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CYCLONE KIT, THE YOUNG GLADIATOR; or, The Locked Valley.

A Strange Mountain Tale, of a Stranger Place and People.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "GILT-EDGED DICK," "BONANZA BILL," ETC., ETC.



CYCLONE KIT THEN DROVE HIS DIRK TO THE HILT INTO THE TOP OF THE FOURTH BEAR'S NECK.

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CHAPTER I.

THE WITCH OF PHANTOM ACRE.

TOWARD the close of a mild, autumnal day, which had been damp and misty in the mountains, a horseman was riding along a sort of dugway trail that wound around, in and among the rugged mountains, many hundred feet above the level of the prairies.

He was mounted upon a fine large horse, of jet-black color, whose trappings were both fanciful and costly.

The rider was a young man, in point of years and appearance, and was possessed of a strong, well-molded figure, wherein were grace, symmetry and strength.

His face was well-chiseled and handsome, with dark, eagle eyes, a firm mouth, and mustache and narrow goatee, while his head was crowned with a wealth of dark hair, which swept back over his shoulders from beneath a broad-rimmed "prairie" hat.

Otherwise, he was clad in citizen's attire, with his pants thrust in a pair of knee-boots, and a belt about his waist, which contained a pair of large six shooters, and a lasso; also, he wore a handsome rifle slung to his back.

He looked every inch a free and easy roving scout, as he rode along, and there was an expression of good-natured content upon his face, as he took in his surroundings.

"I wonder if I am ever going to get rich out of this experiment?" he soliloquized. "I've been wild-goosing it for about a month now, without any result. I am inclined to think that after all the Walled City of Gold-Flake is more of a myth than reality. Eh? don't you think so, Primrose?" patting his horse affectionately upon the neck.

"Yes, I reckon about the most sensible thing for me to do, would be to pull back for civilized parts, instead of looking after a fabulous city, pictured by an old, time-hardened pilgrim, who one day chanced to drop down in Tombstone—a city whose streets were paved with cobblestones of gold, and whose people were banded together in one blasted Mormon family, to keep out us prowling prospectors. Egad! they'll have a time and a half a-keeping me out, and they'll have to start a Mormon burying ground before I leave, providing I can get my work in on those golden cobblestones."

Then he laughed—a peculiar, ringing laugh it was, the echoes of which, borne back to him in weird intonations, caused the young prospector to start.

"Humph! that reminded me of the mocking reply of something unearthly," he muttered. "This is a region well-calculated for things uncanny and hideous, I should say. Even the rocks look as if they contained grim secrets, calculated to make a man's hair rise."

Night grew on, and still he did not draw rein, but allowed his horse to pick its way along the narrow trail, as it ran in a tortuous course through the dismal mountain regions.

As he rode his eyes were ever busy noting the country around him, and searching out a suitable camping-spot for the night, for he had ridden far, and was fatigued.

Just as the shadows were gathering thick into dense darkness, he abruptly drew rein at a point where the mountain was split in twain by a narrow black ravine, or more properly, fissure—for its width was barely sufficient to admit of the passage of a horse.

How deep into the mountain the black pass penetrated, the lone traveler had no means of learning just then, but he presumed it ran through the range to the opposite side.

This, however, was not what had caused him to halt, he had journeyed all day without finding any water for his horse or himself, and he knew that it would not do to go into camp without first finding that requisite.

Therefore, when the sound of gurgling water

reached his hearing, he was not slow to stop, and gazed searchingly about to learn its location.

But though he looked and still heard the gurgling, rippling sound, he could not see the water.

"Queer!" he muttered. "I certainly hear the welcome sound, but nary a stream can I see. Ah!"

A thought struck him.

Slipping from his saddle he dropped upon his knees, and applied his ear to the trail, just opposite the mouth of the ravine.

The mystery to him was solved.

The water he heard had an underground channel, and evidently had its source somewhere up the ravine. At the point where he listened was a little crevice in the rock, from which came the sound of the subterranean stream. Evidently the water ran several feet below the surface, so the young scout knew there was no hope for supplying his needs at that point.

"I wonder if I'd better venture into that black flue?" he muttered. "Pears to me as if it might be a grizzly or a rattlesnake retreat. But, I must have water, and I might have to go some miles before I'd strike any more. It's darker than the ace of spades in there, but I'll guarantee darkness never skeered Cyclone Kit yet. Primrose, I guess I'd better take you along, fer I wouldn't want to lose you."

And remounting, he headed his steed into the ravine, which was descending, as it ran back into the mountain.

Once fairly within its environs, he became cognizant of the fact that it was about the darkest place he had ever entered, for it was next to impossible, at first, for him to see his hands before his face.

Primrose, too, did not like the place, as was evident by his snorts, and the carefulness he used in advancing.

"Steady, now, Prim!" his rider said. "Don't get uneasy. I opine we've been in some tip-over tumble-down scrapes, before this, and we hadn't ought to get frightened easily. Who knows, old boy?—this may be the route to our destination—the Walled City of Gold-Flake. I've had an idea a fellow would have to strike some such a place as this, before he got to travellin' over those golden cobble-stones!"

Constantly descending ran the trail for half a mile—then, abruptly ascending it continued for several miles, while beneath it, all the way, ran the gurgling water.

"I reckon I'm up for a night of it," the scout muttered, after he had allowed nearly an hour to elapse without speaking. "I've some doubts now, if I ever reach the end of this confounded ravine."

But, at last he did, rather sooner than he had looked for.

He rode up and out upon a sort of table-land, of a few acres dimensions, beyond which there appeared to be another abrupt stepping-off place.

As he did so, his horse suddenly came to a halt in front of a rude hut, of wigwam shape, which had been framed of poles, and sided up with tanned skins, and in the front of which stood a wild-looking personage, in woman's garb, engaged in kindling a fire, with some pieces of punk.

She uttered a shrill cry, as Primrose gave a snort and hastily grasped a rifle, which leaned against her lodge.

"Halt! Who comes there, at this unseemly hour, to the Phantom Acre?" she demanded, in a cracked, shrill voice, as she raised her rifle, threateningly.

The stranger took a good look at her, before answering.

She was a woman of perhaps sixty years, with yellow, badly-wrinkled skin, glaring gray eyes, and a large mouth, which habitually exposed two tusk-like, protruding teeth—the only teeth in fact, she could boast of.

Her hair, originally black, but now streaked here and there with lines of white, hung matted and disheveled partly over her eyes and about her shoulders; her hands were bony and hard, with long claw-like fingers.

What little clothing she wore was in rags, even to a flaring red cape about her shoulders, and her feet were shoeless.

All in all, she was the nearest approach to a witch that the stranger had ever encountered.

"You can put down your gun, old Mother Grundy!" he assured her jocularly. "I am not going to eat you up, nor carry you off. I'm simply searching for some water, for myself and horse. Do you happen to know of any around this part of the country?"

"No!" was the sharp answer, as the woman regarded him suspiciously. "Man or beast never comes here for water but to die. This is the Land of the Haunted, from which intruders never escape."

"Oh! they don't, eh? According to that I must be booked for sudden dissolution!"

"You are right. Death is the fate of every one entering the Phantom Acre. You have come, and such a fate shall you be meted."

"You mean to insinuate that you're a sort of supernatural concern, then, do you?"

"Ha! ha! ha! No!" and the woman laughed in a blood-curdling manner. "I'm Old Meg, the Witch; I'm the earthly agent of those gone to the spirit-land. I control their actions and protect their rights!"

"Ah! so that's the size of it. Now it looks to me as if you are about as crazy an old delegate as is often picked up. But, be that as it may, you mind your business and I'll not harm you."

"Ho! ho! So you're afraid of me!"

"No; I don't easily get scared even by as repulsive-looking ogres as you!"

"We shall see! we shall see!" she cried, flying into a sudden passion. "You have doubted my power: you shall behold it. Zamiel!"

She stepped a pace toward her lodge and raised her hand above her head with a weird laugh.

The adventurer watched her, and involuntarily gazed around the Phantom Acre.

What he saw was not calculated to strengthen his disbelief in things supernatural, and he could but give vent to an exclamation of horror.

Standing about a rod apart, all around the table-land, at its extreme edge, were tall, spectral figures, draped in flowing white and looking very ghost-like, indeed—as ghosts are supposed to look.

To add to the uncanny effect, a strange bluish-yellow halo of light clung around each figure.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shrieked Old Meg, dancing about wildly. "What think you about my power, now, doubting white dog?"

It was a moment before the stranger could command his voice; then he turned and surveyed the witch with a stern, unflinching gaze.

"Well, as to your happy family of spooks, I must admit that you have got them under good control. But I presume if one took time to examine the mysteries of this place, a very neat job of mechanical engineering could be brought to light, whereby you work those white, sheet-covered, phosphorus-painted automatons!"

And, glancing around again, the scout perceived that the apparitions, or whatever they were, were gone.

Old Meg was close beside his horse, peering up into his face, when he turned toward her once more.

"Your name?" she interrogated, eagerly, huskily; "tell me your name!"

"Why?" he asked, grimly.

"Because—I must know it—I must! You are one out of a thousand whose name I would pause to ask. Tell me! tell me!"

"Well, if it will do you any good to know, I generally blow about on a breeze under the title of Cyclone Kit. If I have, or ever had any other name, it does not matter to you, nor to your automaton spirits!" was the answer the adventurer vouchsafed.

"Cyclone Kit! Cyclone Kit!" Old Meg muttered, digging at her head with her talon-like fingers. "A good name—characteristic of the man. Yes, you are a cyclone—you are a rock with a foundation—a man of steel! I can read you better than I can the phantom cipher upon the picture rocks. You are the very person I've been looking for these many days—a man whom man or devil or ghost could not change from a fixed resolution!"

"Humph! and may I inquire what an old fossil of your caliber might want with such a man as I?" Kit demanded, in surprise.

"Need you ask? I want you for a purpose—ha! ha! yes, a purpose. I want you for my envoy—my sworn coadjutor, in all my plans and schemes. I want you, when I die, to inherit my gold, my witchcraft, my soul! But, before you can do that you must go into the borders of the infernal—you must descend, hence, into the Walled City of Gold-Flake!"

CHAPTER II.

OLD MEG'S STORY.

It might not be wondered at if Cyclone Kit stared at this announcement. Here was this old mountain ogre volunteering to send him to the very place he had months ago set out to find.

What did it mean? What trap was being laid for him, or for what purpose did Old Meg propose to utilize him?

These thoughts flashed through his mind with lightning rapidity, as he listened, and looked down upon her, as they stood in the dim night-shades that pervaded the Phantom Acre.

"You are a great man," she pursued, thoughtfully, after a minute, as if recalling the memory of some other brave man she had met. "You are fearless, shrewd to conceive, quick to act, independent and resolute. That is just what I want. I want a man who is not afraid to face fire, fiends and fury to accomplish an object. Tell me, what do you think about becoming an envoy to the Evil One, as they call me in the walled city?"

"It depends altogether on what you want of me," Kit replied, a little sternly and suspiciously. "If you reckon to get me into some infernal trap, so that you can exercise a madwoman's spite on me, you can't do it."

"Ha! ha! no—I knew that on the first seeing of you. It needs but one glance to tell that you are not often caught asleep. Nor do I so wish to catch you. Come! ride forward to the edge of the Phantom Acre, and I will show you the Mormon cage; then, come back with me to my castle here"—with a grimace toward the hut—"and I will tell you what I want of you," and she led off toward the opposite side of the plateau or table-land.

Cyclone Kit slipped from his saddle, drew his revolvers and followed. He had no fear as to his ability to cope with this strange being, unless she should spring a surprise on him. In that event he was resolved to sell his life or liberty dearly.

It did not take long to reach the point where the Phantom Acre ended, in an awful abyss—a black, seemingly fathomless gulf of space.

Before them yawned a deep natural basin, sunken down into the bowels of the mountains several hundred feet, the sides of which, formed by smoothly-worn walls of mountain rock, were at once perpendicular and dizzy.

Half a mile wide by a mile in length was this pocket of nature, and it was at once eminently plain to the eye of an observer that no human being could scale those wonderful bastions, either in ascent or descent, as there were no outcropping ledges and few crevices whereby a person could gain or maintain foothold.

"There! there!" Old Meg screamed, seeming to grow suddenly furious as she pointed down into the abyss. "There is the walled city of the Mormon saints—there lies the cursed city of Gold-Flake, where people enter never to return!"

Cyclone Kit gazed down into the yawning gulf, in curiosity, for, after all, it was not unlike the place described by the vagabond miner, who had, while intoxicated at Tombstone, spun off a highly improbable yarn about a mountain-locked golden city in the heart of this desolate country.

Far as it was down to the bottom of the pocket, Kit was able to distinguish the log and shanty structures of a village near the heart of the basin; also there was a stream of water running through the length of the basin, either end of which was hidden from view in dense growths of chaparral, which choked up the ends of the strange valley.

"You see!" Old Meg repeated, after a moment, "you see the walled city of human hellions down there, where law and order are made by one wolf in man's clothing. That is Gold-Flake! Once all was mine—the gold, the silver, the land, the forest, the game—all! Come! I will tell you about it, envoy."

Kit mechanically obeyed, by following her back to the hut and entering after her.

The interior was barren of anything cheerful, a few ashes of a now dead fire on the ground being all to show that the place had ever been occupied as a human habitation. There were no stools, no bed, no furniture whatever, to give the interior the appearance of a home.

As soon as they entered, Old Meg produced a lantern, lit it, and then with her foot scraped the ashes from off the rocky floor, until she had uncovered a large ring which was fastened therein.

Pulling on this, she raised a large square block or trap-door, which disclosed to view an aperture and a stone staircase, descending apparently into the bowels of the earth.

"First you go, and then I will close the trap," the witch ordered, and Kit obeyed, his curiosity now thoroughly aroused.

Somehow he trusted her more now than at first.

She soon followed, and lighted him down the precipitous staircase, until they came to a land-

ing or passage, out of which they entered into an underground apartment of considerable size.

Here a fire was burning, and torches were lit and thrust into niches in the wall.

The furniture consisted of a rude bedstead and bedding, a few chairs, a table, and a number of trinkets, including several glass covered boxes of various sizes.

Upon the table were heaps of gold and silver nuggets, bags of dust and stacks of greenbacks and gold coins.

Cyclone Kit gazed at them curiously, as he became seated—Old Meg noted the fact, and chuckled.

"Yes, there's a fortune there for my heir, whoever that may be," she said, "and that ain't all. There's more buried on the Phantom Acre, lots of it! And I've earned it all from them who hate me—the Mormons. But I was to tell you about the walled city."

She took a sip from a bottle that stood on the table, cleared her throat, and then began:

"It was years ago—yes, many long years—that Joe and I eloped from our homes, in New England, and penetrated to this wild region, to grow up with the country. We were both young and ambitious, and wanted to get away from sin, temptation and worldliness. Well, we got this far, and the place struck Joe's fancy. He looked down into the basin, and said:

"There's gold, there, Meg; we'll squat here." And so we did.

"We went to work, hand in hand, and built us a cabin upon the acre, above. Then, while I hunted and cooked, Joe prospected for a way of reaching the locked valley, but persevering efforts failed to reveal any.

"That there was gold there he felt a firm conviction, and he meant to gain access to the valley; so after months of figuring, he could see no better route than to hew a staircase down through a seam in the rock of the mountain, to the valley below.

"In order to do this, he had to go into the more civilized portions of the territory, and procure the necessary tools, and this cost another month of time.

"Well, to make a long story short, we worked faithfully, nearly night and day, for two years, before we set foot into that valley; then, we tore down our shanty or cabin, and moved it into the basin, where the gold "wash" of many centuries sanded over the bottom. It was the realization of our wildest dreams—fortune upon fortune lay buried in that gulch basin, at our command.

"In our eagerness to grasp this golden treasure, we were so thoughtless as to leave our staircase unguarded, and, one day, two wandering ruffians gained access to the gulch, thereby, and discovered our secret.

"We succeeded in driving them out of the basin, but could not get them out of the staircase.

"Less than a month after that, a score of Mormon families, from Salt Lake, came pouring in upon our bonanza, and all our visions of permanent prosperity became blighted. We were unable to defend ourselves against such odds, and were at once taken captives, and a Mormon rule was inaugurated, under the lead of one Juan Cordiz, who still occupies that position.

"From that period dated the town you now see there, and a reign of the devil began. I was allotted, with my little daughter, then two years old, to one Jabez Harp, an unprincipled wretch, who already boasted of five wives, while my husband was handed over to an ugly widow, whose husband had deserted her only to be shot by the Danites.

"You can perhaps imagine, judging by what I am now, that I would never submit to such a fate, and, strong-willed woman that I was, I was not long in making my escape, and taking possession of the pass, after killing five Mormon devils, to gain my point.

"I had 'em, then, I thought, for well equipped as I was, with weapons, and powder, I could hold them at bay, until they would have starved.

"But I reck'd without my host, for they had me at the weakest point of all. My pretty little baby was still in their power, and Cordiz sent me a note by a flag-o'-truce courier, stating that unless I came to terms in the way of a settlement, he would burn my child at the stake, Indian fashion, scalp it, and cut out its heart. Then he went on to propose that I should remain in possession of the passage, in their interests, and admit no one to the valley, except as they might order, for which consideration he would permit my child to live, until such a

time as I should be able to pay him ten thousand dollars for its custody.

"What could I do? I had no hope but to obey, until such a time as I could steal a march on them.

"To add to my misery, and my enmity against yonder town, my husband not only joined the Mormons, but took to himself two more wives, and is now considered one of the pillars of their heathen church. And it was just sixteen years ago that they took possession of the walled valley, of which Juan Cordiz rules as the monarch."

Cyclone Kit did not know whether she had concluded or not, when she paused, but waited a few minutes, and then said:

"I comprehend, I believe. For a matter of sixteen years you have remained in this vicinity for the purpose of getting back your child, and getting possession of your husband."

"Oh! no! no—not my husband! My child only. Sixteen long years have I maintained my vigil, and by aid of a powerful field-glass, have seen my child day by day, as she grew up to womanhood. But, I have not waited for the brute who forsook me for the Mormon faith—except it be to get a chance to kill him. I have waited to get possession of my child: I dared not disobey Juan Cordiz's orders, for he is a human wolf, and would not hesitate to kill her, if he thought I were neglecting my office."

"You have, then, in all this time, never been down in the valley?"

"No—that is, but once, when I was chased by bloodhounds, owned by Cordiz."

"You tell a most singular story; still, I am inclined to believe you!" Cyclone Kit declared, thoughtfully. "If all is as you say, you are certainly more sinned against than sinning. Do you think your child will know you?"

"Probably not, as she was a mere chit when taken from me."

"Then, why disturb her? You must be aware that you are not a person, in point of appearance, to whom a girl would naturally turn for mothership; you would repulse rather than attract. Probably it would be a serious blow for her to know that an accredited witch was her mother, and she would be unwilling to recognize you as such."

"Your argument is not without weight. I have sometimes thought so, myself; but, then, God knows I cannot give her up to a life of Mormonism, knowing she is my child, and it is my duty to save her. Until a few weeks ago, I used to have a chance to hear how she was treated, through the deaf and dumb motions of a lad who lives with the Mormons. He would lie on his back, on the bank of the stream, and make his fingers go in the mute language, so that by aid of my field-glass I could tell what he said. Most always he would tell me—'Your daughter is well and all right.' The last time he conversed with me, he motioned: 'Bertie is to be made the wife of Juan Cordiz, in a couple of months,' after that I never saw him again."

"The Mormons probably caught him and imprisoned him, eh?"

"I think so. Oh! heaven forbid that my pure innocent child be forced to marry that human monster, Juan Cordiz!"

"And she shall not, if Cyclone Kit can help it!" the young adventurer cried, decidedly. "If it is your wish, I will enter that Walled City of Gold-Flake, seek out your daughter, apprise her of the existing state of affairs, and, with her permission, bring her to you. You have wealth—you can then seek a more civilized land, and dwell in more pleasant circumstances!"

"And you will do this for me—oh! you will do this for me, sir?" the old woman cried, tears of joy coursing down her furrowed cheeks.

"Yes—or at least, I'll make a try for it!"

"Then may God bless and prosper you. But you must not let it leak out that I sent you. I must not anger Juan Cordiz, until my child is safe."

"It shall be as you say. It is night; I will go at once on my mission!" Cyclone Kit said, buckling his belt a notch tighter.

CHAPTER III.

"WE MUST FIGHT!"

THE joy of Old Meg seemed to know no bounds at this decision of Cyclone Kit, and she dropped on her knees at his feet, and prayed the saints to guide and protect him.

Once his mind was made up, Kit was eager to get to work. He accordingly looked well to the condition of his weapons, and announced his readiness to descend into the Mormon settlement, first having arranged with the old witch to care for his horse during his absence.

"Is there any outlet from the valley, except by the way I am to enter it?" he asked, when all was in readiness.

"There undoubtedly is, but where or of what nature I am unable to say. Some of the Mormons often leave the village and return with purchases, and have done so since they lived there, but where they make their exit or entrance is more than I am able to say."

"Then that will be one thing I must learn during my sojourn in the den," Kit announced, with a smile. "Now, lead ahead, and I will make a break."

"It is not necessary to go out of this room to reach the passage," Old Meg answered, pulling aside the bedstead, and pointing to another slab trap door in the floor, similar to the one on the table-land above.

"Raise that trap, and you will find a continuation of the stairway it took us so many months to complete. Follow it down carefully and you will come out in the basin below."

It was as Old Meg had said.

The little mountain-locked town of Gold-Flake was a hard place, and in a literal sense, a monarchy in itself, over which one Juan Cordiz, a Spanish-American disciple of the Mormon church, held supreme sway.

The majority of the people were firm believers in the Mormon faith, and slaves to the will of their exacting and stern Prophet, while the other part of the population was made up of the ruffian element, who served Cordiz for the gold and whisky they got, more than for any love or respect they had for him or his church.

Cordiz was a selfish and unscrupulous villain and tyrant, and hardly a person was there in his church who did not fear and hate him; but they were, as a crowd, bound to support and uphold him in all his actions, whether distasteful to them or not.

Ever anxious to extend his power and increase his dupes, in number, he had from time to time caused outsiders to be brought to the town, and pressed into allegiance to his rule, and the demands of the church, so that it was a heterogeneous collection of humans that went to make up the population of Gold-Flake.

The town itself was quite a pretty place, of perhaps sixty or seventy dwellings, mostly built of logs and stone; then, in addition, there was a sort of temple of stone; Cordiz's own dwelling, a large, strangely-shaped piece of masonry, built against the side of the basin wall; a supply store, and a large, long, high inclosure of logs, partly roofed, wherein was a ring, with tiers of seats around the sides, reminding one of the Roman amphitheaters of olden times. Adjoining this, and connecting with it, was another long, low log structure, which was used as a saloon.

On the evening that Cyclone Kit started to enter the pocket, a number of the rougher class of the town's inhabitants were collected in the saloon, engaged in imbibing the ardent, pretty freely, as well as in a discussion that was at once animated and earnest.

As usual with their class of characters, when affected by stimulants, their argument had turned to the subject of personal prowess, and as there were two sides of the dispute, there naturally were two objects of contention in the persons of the same number of local ruffians.

Of these, one was a tall, rawboned borderman, with straggling tow-colored beard, fiery eyes and a red nose, on the end of which was a tuft of hair. He was brawny and powerfully built, and was evidently a man of prodigious strength.

His companions addressed him as Coyote Jake, and he looked brutal enough to merit the title.

The other "best" man was called Alf Legree, and was of considerable lesser size, than his opponent, though a man of great muscular strength and quickness.

He was swarthy complexioned, and black haired, with mustache and goatee to match, and was the impersonation in point of looks, of all that was disagreeable and evil.

Both he and Coyote Jake were attired in top boots, corduroy pants, red shirts and slouch hats, as were the majority of the party, and, likewise, were armed with revolvers and knives.

Among those engaged in argument were some half a dozen of other pilgrims of the same type, who rejoiced in the possession of such titular appendages as "Turkey Tom," "Carbonate Cal," "Grizzly George," and "Prairie Phil," while the two objects of discussion stood leaning against the bar, unable often to crowd a word in edgewise.

"Thar ain't no use o' talkin'," Turkey Tom

declared, smiting his fist heavily upon the bar. "Thar ain't no sech phizerkle qualities about Coyote Jake as thar is in Alf Legree. Alf he just stands high cock-olorum o' this hyar city, an' ye kan't fetch a feller as will knock a chip off'm his shoulder, or beat him at any game."

"Whew! one would think ter heer ye crow, that Coyote Jack hedn't won his spurs, as boss o' the burg!" Carbonate Cal exclaimed. "Ef any o' you chaps wants ter match Legree ag'in' Jake fer the 'scales,' al' ye've got to do is nominate yer 'pile,' an' heer's w'at'll cover et, kerslap!"

"Bab! there's no use o' wranglin' about that, fellers," Prairie Phil said. "Ef thar's enny doubt about ther respective qualities uv the gents, et's bound to be settled soon, as ye may surmise!"

"What! how's that?" Legree asked, for the first time speaking in several minutes.

"How's that?" Coyote Jake asked, also manifesting interest.

"It's how like this," Philip declared, taking in a huge chew. "The Prophet is a-goin' tew take to himself a fresh wife, an' you know he allus celebrates on sech occasions by lickin' two o' the best galoots in the town."

The faces of the others betrayed surprise.

"Juan Cordiz going to marry again?" several exclaimed, simultaneously.

"Yas, you bet! leastwise that's the rumor. Six ain't enough ter keep him company, so he's goin' to build on an addition an' waltz in a seventh."

"Phew! won't there be war in camp then?" Carbonate Cal grunted. "Queen will be b'ilin' wi' rage, and some one 'll get a job o' knife-stickin', you bet! Who's goin' to be the seventh?"

"The gal Prophet's bin raisin' up the last few years—the old witch's darter, you know, Bertie Bird. She's calculated to be the purtiest in Gold-Flake."

"An' the Prophet's a-goin' to take her, eh?" Legree demanded, fiercely.

"That's the talk up at the mansion," Philip agreed. "Why? Hev you got any lip-in', in the matter?"

"Waal, I reckon! I've set my mind on appropriatin' that gal myself, an' I don't allow Prophet Cordiz has any right ter object or interfere."

"Ho! ho! ye'd better not tell him that, or he'll have you jugged for resisting his rules."

"To blazes with his rules! I don't allow he's no better man than I be, an' he knows I ain't afeard o' him, if Coyote Jake is."

"Who is it that says he fears not Juan Cordiz?" a voice cried in stern accents, and the group of men turned to behold the Mormon Prophet standing in the doorway, a frown of displeasure upon his face.

"Who was it?" he repeated, when no one answered. "Speak up, some of you lubbers, or I'll run you through with my sword."

But the ruffians seemed inclined to shield one another, despite their different opinions as to who was the bully of the town, and accordingly did not answer the query propounded by their ruler.

"Aha! so there is a pretty bit of tyranny here, eh?" Don Juan growled, advancing threateningly; "a sort of mutinous spirit that needs quelling. Alf Legree, you are the man that said you were not afraid of me."

Legree did not deny it—did not answer at all. It was plain that he was afraid of the Prophet of the walled city, and that he had company in those who clustered about him, for they all shrank back as the Don advanced.

"Yes, Legree, I heard you say it—that you were not afraid of me—and it is not the first time I've heard it hinted that you would some day 'clean me out' and take my place at the head of our people. You must well know that you are no match for me in point of strength, skill or celerity."

"Perhaps not," Legree finally said, "but I presume I could give you a pretty stiff rub. I ain't much at brag, but I never allow a man to kick dust in my eyes, no matter ef he do feel a few pegs bigger nor I!"

The Prophet looked surprised and angered.

It was the first time his supremacy had been disputed by any of his flock.

He had made it his aim to be feared and obeyed, and had succeeded, until now, admirably.

He was a man not calculated to inspire any timid person with feelings of assurance or admiration—a man who stood six feet three, in his boots, and who was massively yet gracefully framed, with a dusky Spanish face and black eyes, a sweeping iron-gray mustache, and hair

to match—the whole combined with a habitual facial expression that was dark, evil and sinister.

He was attired in a rich gold-trimmed Spanish costume of velvet, and armed with a gold-hilted sword, and revolvers.

He stood regarding Legree for a few moments, after the latter's declaration, with a glitter in his deadly eye, that meant hatred.

"We shall see about this a few days hence, when I take the fair Bertie Bird to my nest. I always celebrate an event of marriage, by challenging the best man in Gold-Flake to meet me in mortal combat, and I hereby challenge you to stand up before me!"

"And I respectfully decline!" Legree said, gruffly. "You can try Coyote Jake, here, first!"

"Not muchly!" the valiant Jacob declared. "When I want to get dissected, I'll go before a regular mederle body."

Don Juan laughed, tauntingly.

"A brave gang of cowards you are, to be sure!" he sneered. "Why, when I was of your ages, I could tackle ten men, single-handed. But, I am getting old, now—

"But none too old to marry!"

"By the way, I am expecting a party of people from Eastern Utah, to pay me a visit, and desire that the greatest attention be shown them, in order that we may perhaps induce them to settle here with us."

Then, the Prophet turned to depart. But, in the doorway, stood the commanding figure of a man.

And that man was none other than Cyclone Kit.

The Prophet uttered a sanctimonious oath, as he saw him.

"Hello! what means this intrusion? Who are you, sir stranger?" he cried, drawing his gleaming sword, with a lightning movement that would have surprised even a professional swordsman. "Speak, man, before I cleave thy skull in twain, with a single blow. What do you want—who are you?"

"Well, sir!" Kit replied, composedly, "to the best of my ideas, my name is Cyclone Kit, and I just tumbled down into this pit, to see what kind of a menagerie was kept here. Quite a fall from them rocks, above, I allow!"

"More of a fall than you ever made, sir!" the Don declared, emphatically. "Out with it—how did you reach this place?"

"As I remarked before, I come down on the air-line. 'Spect, when I tumbled over them cliffs, I'd a' been smashed up purty bad, only I happened to have an ambriller with me, an' that eased me down, like slippin' off an iceberg."

"You are an infernal liar, and if you don't tell me how you gained access to this place I'll cut you up, inch by inch!" the Prophet cried, flying into a rage.

"I'll bet you ducats you won't," Kit responded, with his usual imperturbable coolness. "There ain't enough edge on your toad-sticker there to make a crease in my pelt."

"Oho! ain't there, though? You evidently don't know whom you are talking to, sir!"

"Oh, yes I do—know ye like a Psalm-book."

"Well, who am I?" the Don asked, in curiosity to know if the audacious stranger really did know him.

"Oh! you're a pocket edition of Brigham Young!" Kit answered, readily. "You claim the name of Juan Cordiz here—a Mormon pretended Prophet—but thar's them that knows you once had another name."

Cordiz started and flushed, while his glittering eyes scanned the face of the young adventurer eagerly.

"Curse you! perhaps you are right," he growled. "I may have had a hundred names, but it is enough that you do not know them. You say you are Cyclone Kit—are you aware that you have ventured recklessly into your tomb?"

"Oh, no! I ain't down on the books for several years yet. You of course will extend me the hospitality of your church and city, providing I hitch on to a dozen wives, more or less—will you not?"

"I don't think I will," the Don growled. "You are evidently a person I don't care to inflict on the people of my church as a brother. Therefore, as no man entering here can ever leave alive, there is but one thing else to be done—we must fight!"

CHAPTER IV.
BENEATH THE PULPIT.

It was no surprise to Cyclone Kit when Don Juan announced that he must fight.

When he had fully determined to come into the locked valley in quest of Bertie Bird, he knew he would have trouble, and had made up his mind that it behooved him to establish a reputation from the start which would give him prestige and position.

Well satisfied that he could look out for Number One, he had, on reaching the Mormon town, made directly for the saloon, presuming he would be able to set the ball a-rolling, in the way of a fuss, and at once get up a reputation. The Don's proposal accordingly gave him much satisfaction.

"Have to fight, eh?" he said, looking the Prophet over from head to foot. "Well, I don't mind, providing you know your business. I dislike to measure arms with a man who is not at least my equal."

"I dare say you will find me all you can accommodate," the Don sneered, with a harsh laugh. "What way can you fight best?"

"Oh, it's immaterial. I am a good shot, as shooting generally goes; I can dig you in the ribs with a bowie or a sword; ain't bad at rough-an'-tumble or a scientific knock-down; chewin' off noses and ears I can do up brown; am a tolerable fair booter; an' when it comes to breaking necks, gouging out eyes or wrestlin', I allow I'm *thar!*"

"I may infer from that, that your specialty is wrestling. Very well. To-morrow night I will meet you in the coliseum, adjoining, and cordially throw you over my head and break your neck. Until then I shall have you watched to see that you do not steal anything. Out of my way, sir, and allow me to pass."

"Not until you take back that insinuation that I am a thief!" Kit cried, sternly, and advancing nearer to the Prophet. "Either chaw your words, or I'll show you a trick you never saw before."

"Ha! ha! *Indeed!* Know once and for all that Juan Cordiz, Mormon Prophet and gentleman, never takes back what he utters. Out of my path, vagabond!"

And drawing his sword once more, he strode toward the door, despite the fact that Cyclone blocked his path.

But Kit didn't back at all.

Standing his ground fearlessly, he waited until the Don poised his sword preparatory for a lunge; then, with a lightning movement, he threw himself forward upon his hands and made a wonderful handspring that landed him neatly upon his feet on the other side of the Prophet. Whirling quickly around, he caught the astounded Don by the leg and shoulder, and by the strength of his powerful arms, raised him above his head and hurled him with terrific force against a window near at hand—the entire action occupying but a few seconds of time. There was a crash of glass, and the anatomy of the Prophet disappeared from view in the darkness of the night without.

"Next!" Kit said, turning to the bystanders. "Is there any one else who wants to try me a whirl?"

"I guess not," Prairie Phil answered, shaking his head. "You're too rich for our blood, or we'd try and accommodate ye. Reckon the Prophet will interview ye again, though, as soon as he can reach you."

"No, I don't think so," Kit replied, going to the window and peering out. "There he goes now, limping, and swearing like a pirate, forgetting, very likely, that he is a pillar of the church. Ho! ho! ho!" and he laughed merrily.

And it proved so. The Don did not return, evidently having got his fill of the young gladiator.

Satisfied that no direct or open attack would be made upon him for a time, Cyclone Kit lounged about the saloon awhile, watching the people who came in and out, after which he took his departure and went out into the basin.

The hour was about midnight, and it was very dark and beginning to rain.

He must find some place in which to spend the remainder of the night, and with this object in view, he set out, groping his way through the inky gloom.

He had not gone far before he heard the sound of two voices just ahead of him, and pausing a moment, he became satisfied that the owners of them were also advancing in a like direction with himself.

Something impelled him to glide swiftly and cautiously nearer, in order that he might learn if the topic of their conversation was anything that had a bearing upon his case.

He got so near that even in the darkness he could distinguish that both were figures clad in male attire, even though one of them had a decidedly feminine voice.

"There isn't the least doubt about the matter in my mind," one of the persons said, in an emphatic manner. "The whole circumstances of the case indicate that he came to this section, and if a child exists around here bearing his name, there can be no dispute but what it is the link we are looking after."

"In that case, what good is it going to do you? The old man and woman are living, and you'd have to adopt the whole family, in order to make anything out of the child."

"Even that would pay, were it a matter of necessity, which it is not. If the child, or rather, young woman we are on track of, is the right one, she is a bonanza. The old folks must be pretty old, and would sell out cheap, no doubt, and I could make my own terms as far as the girl is concerned."

"You don't know. I've seen women that even you couldn't attract, with all your suavity and Beau Brummel perfection."

"Very few, I'll wager!"

"Ay, more than a few. But, now, through my treachery to the faith, you have learned so much, what next do you propose to do?—how do you propose to work your plan, here in Gold-Flake?"

"I shall adopt the plan of introduction to the Prophet Juan, which you suggested to me!"

"Yes, that will be your best plan. And remember, if we meet, hereafter, we pass as strangers."

"I understand—strangers. It will be as well thus, as otherwise. Here is your money!"

Kit saw them pause, a moment, and he paused. Then, when they advanced, he did likewise.

He followed them for some distance further, when, to his surprise, they abruptly disappeared from view, and at a point where there was apparently no means of their doing so, naturally, the ground being open, and level.

"I wonder what the blazes this means!" Kit grunted, coming to a temporary halt. "Is it some more of the witchcraft that pervades this vicinity, I wonder?"

He peered ahead, but no sight or sound of the strange couple, did he gain.

"I'll be shot if they ain't gone, for a certainty," he muttered, "and it didn't take 'em a second to become scarce, neither. Maybe it was by way of the secret exit from this place?"

After a moment's reflection he continued on, until he had come about to the place where he had seen the last of them, and made an inspection of the surroundings.

There was nothing he could see having a suspicious look; there was no apparent place close at hand where the twain could have hidden, or where there was any chance for them to have gotten out of sight, except by sinking through the earth, and he could see no opportunity for even that, unless they had swum down the stream, near by.

"Reckon I shall have to cave in, on solving that puzzle, for the present," was his conclusion. I opine, though, that I've got onto the idea of a little scheme that is in course of development. It seems that there is another man, besides myself, who wants possession of Bertie Bird. It behooves me, therefore, to look out for Number One, if I hope to secure her. I wish I could have got a view of the plotters' faces—I should be better prepared to pursue the case."

It was beginning to rain harder, now, and he knew it was advisable to get in under some sort of shelter, soon, as he would get drenched to the skin.

So he struck out again, and in the course of a short walk came to the Mormon temple, or church—a large structure of stone, used by the "saints" as a place of worship, and possessed of as many queer angles and abrupt turns, as Hawthorne's famous "House of Seven Gables."

"I wonder if I can't get a night's lodging in this place?" Kit muttered, glancing around, to see if any person was watching him, and then mounting the steps. "It ought to be a healthy place, as long as it is a church."

He tried the ponderous door, but, as expected, found that it fastened on the other side.

"That settles that, as the egg said to the coffee," he mused. "I guess they don't keep open house for tramps. I wonder how the door is fastened?"

A thought occurring to him, he tried the panels, until he found one that rattled.

Once upon a time he had read of a Mormon edifice in Salt Lake City, the door of which was a marvel of mechanism in the way of sliding panels, and so forth, and he resolved to test the door before him.

Not a little to his surprise, after working the loose panel a few minutes, it suddenly swung

open, making quite an aperture—sufficiently large for him to reach in his arm, and undo the bolts that secured the door.

In a twinkling thereafter, he was within the vestibule of the temple, with both the door and panel securely closed.

All was inky darkness within the vestibule, so he groped his way forward, into the church itself.

Here he stumbled around among seats, until he reached the heart of the place, when he lay down upon one of the rude seats, which consisted of unplanned planks laid upon blocks, and was soon fast asleep, from fatigue and exhaustion.

It was broad daylight, when he next opened his eyes, and lay a few moments, gazing up at the vaulted ceiling of the rude wilderness temple.

At first he failed to remember where he was, but presently all became clear to him, and he sat up and gazed around him.

A dim light had struggled into the church, through a single window, and by its aid, Kit could better contemplate his surroundings, than when he had first entered.

There was a pulpit, and the wooden seats, and that was about all the noticeable features except that a door opened into a room, in the rear of the pulpit.

"I guess this will constitute my place of abode, during my stay here," Kit observed, rising and sauntering down the aisle. "That is, unless I am found here, which, I suppose, according to the Mormon faith, would be a sacrilegious sin. Ha!"

He paused and listened.

A sound had reached his acute hearing.

It was well he listened.

Footsteps sounded in the vestibule, and were evidently coming into the audience room.

Something must be done at once. To be discovered there would not only ruin his chances for further lodging in the temple, but also might bring him into serious trouble, which until he had an interview with Bertie Bird, Cyclone Kit did not desire.

There was no safe place of hiding within the auditorium, and so he made a rapid flight toward the door in the rear of the pulpit.

Before he reached it, however, he discovered a trap-door, just behind the pulpit, and where the Prophet must evidently stand, while exhorting to his flock of polygamous lambs.

Quickly raising this trap, Kit saw a stairway, beneath, which he was not slow in descending, and closing the trap, after him, which left him once more in darkness.

Shortly after, he heard footsteps overhead, and, as there appeared to be no probability of any one descending, he crept close up to the trap, and listened, through a wide crack in the floor.

A voice soon spoke, and he recognized it as that of Don Juan, the Prophet.

"Danites of the Mormon church!" he was saying. "You have heard of the insult your priest and Prophet last night received, at the hand of a strolling vagabond, who gave out his name as Cyclone Kit. He is not only a rascal, but also a villain, and I believe that he comes here with a view of getting data as to the valuable mineral resources of this gulch, that he may bring down upon us a sufficient force of miners to drive us forth, and take possession, himself. You will, therefore, see the danger with which we are menaced, and realize that it becomes us never to allow this fellow to leave Gold-Flake alive!"

A murmur of approval was then audible, evidently coming from several persons.

"Therefore," the Don continued, "you, Chief, will issue placards, offering a thousand dollars to the person who takes Cyclone Kit, dead or alive, and post the same about the town. Do you understand?"

"I do, Prophet," a voice replied.

"Very good. And now, before we adjourn, we had best turn the bloodhounds loose in the church, as the infernal enemy may take a notion to invade the sanctity of our place of worship!"

And, a few minutes later, Cyclone Kit was by no means elated to hear the patter of a number of animal feet, followed by sniffs, and a sharp howl peculiar to the man-hunter.

CHAPTER V.

OUT-GENERATED.

THE howl of the hound spoke better than words, to Cyclone Kit, that he was discovered. They had scented him, already, and it would be a matter of only a few minutes, until they tracked him as far as the trap-door behind the pulpit.

What then would follow?

He had no time to conjecture—he felt well satisfied that the Mormons would raise the trap, and give him up to the mercy of the savage brutes.

Not knowing what kind of a pit the stairway led to, the young adventurer was for the instant at loss what to do.

Finally, he heard the patter of the dogs' feet overhead, followed by another series of howls, and this awakened him to a full sense of his desperate situation.

Descending the stone stairs, as fast as was possible, he soon came to the bottom of them, and found himself in a small cellar, where darkness was dense and the air almost stifling.

Almost a groan burst from his lips, as he ran about the walls of the gloomy apartment, without finding any door or outlet from the place, except by the stairs.

If the dogs were turned down upon him, what would be his fate?

Death, certainly, should they be too many, in number, for him to handle.

It was a moment of terrible suspense, as he stood in the center of the cellar, and listened for the lifting of the trap, while at the same time, he had a revolver in the grasp of either hand.

The moment of suspense lengthened into several, and still the dogs continued to howl, above.

Why was the trap not raised?

That was something Kit could not quite understand.

Had Don Juan and the Mormons left the temple, and were the dogs alone in their discovery?

It would seem so, for minute after minute glided by, with no change in the situation. The dogs howled savagely, and dug at the floor above, with their nails, while Kit stood below, firmly braced, momentarily expecting to see one of the fierce animals come plunging down the stairs.

This idea vanished, finally, however, when he saw no apparent probability that he had been discovered by others than the bloodhounds.

The Mormons must have let the dogs loose, and immediately departed thereafter," Kit concluded, "and if that's the case, there's only one safe thing to do. I must kill the confounded brutes, and escape while I have a chance. I think I can get rid of the animals without serious trouble."

Accordingly, thrusting one revolver in his belt, he grasped the other in the right hand, and crept up the stairs to the trap-door.

The dogs seemed to scent his approach, for they howled and tore around the harder, seemingly furious to get at their would-be victim.

Getting directly beneath the crevice in the floor, Cyclone Kit peered up through it into the room above, while lying upon his back, with his revolver ready for use.

He could see the dogs dashing to and fro directly over him.

To pick them off, one by one, as they passed over the crevice, was the easiest thing in the world, and he proceeded to do it.

Thrusting the muzzle of his revolver into the crevice, he fired when the head of one of the brutes became exposed to view.

The next instant there were some terrible yelps and snarls, which ended in a dying wail.

One man-hunter was done for, at least.

Watching eagerly, Kit soon caught another in the same manner, and then a third.

Listening intently, he then became satisfied that but one remained, and that he heard trotting away, proving that the animal was retreating, probably frightened at the fate of its companions.

"If I don't settle that one's hash I may not get another chance!" was Kit's instant decision, and pushing up the trap-door, he leaped out into the church.

It was a fatal action, so far as liberty was concerned, for he was instantly seized from behind by a number of strong hands, and forced to the floor.

And though he struggled with the strength of a Hercules, he could not master the great odds against him.

Twice he hurled them away from him, with a superhuman effort, but each time they sprung back upon him, half a dozen in number, and finally succeeded in binding him securely, and raising him to a standing position.

He was then able to note the fact that his captors were all masked with thick crape veils—also that Juan Cordiz, the Mormon Prophet, was perched on the top of the pulpit, where he

had evidently been superintending the whole business.

"Hal ha! ha!" he laughed, leering evilly at Cyclone Kit. "We caught you, after all, didn't we?"

"At the cost of the lives of your bloodhounds, yes," Kit responded, quietly.

"Oh, they were of no account, or I shouldn't have turned them loose for you to kill. Cyclone Christopher, you are what I call a man-marvel—a man of extraordinary nerve. You are as brave as a lion, and quite as dangerous, if left at large. But for this fact of your bravery I should shoot you down without hesitation. As it is, I have some respect for you, and shall, for awhile, keep you imprisoned, until, for my own amusement, I can conceive some plan which, while you are struggling for your life, will thoroughly test your skill and nerve. I shall arrange a programme of almost impossibilities for you to perform, and if you carry it out you shall be given your liberty. Pepper, take him to the 'nest,' and give him a breakfast of raw meat. We want to get his brute blood up!"

Cyclone Kit listened, his face passively calm in expression, but his eyes gleaming with a stern light.

"Very well. Though I don't claim to be a man to accomplish impossibilities, I shall take advantage of any opportunities that may be offered me to escape from your infernal town. Feed me on raw meat or whatever you like, remembering that according as I am treated I shall eventually retaliate, with compound interest."

"That I'll risk," the Don replied. "Out with him, Pepper, and while you are about it, you may as well give him a march about the town, so that the folks may know him when they see him hereafter."

Acting upon these orders, the Danites—as Kit concluded they were—cut the bonds which held his feet, then two of the men grasped him by either arm, and two walked ahead, while the others brought up the rear.

And thus formed into a procession, the party left the church, Don Juan slightly in advance of the rest, and marched down the only street of the town.

Cyclone Kit walked proudly erect, an expression of cool defiance upon his handsome face.

People rushed from the houses along the line of march to get a peep at the daring stranger who had had the audacity to insult their ruler, the Prophet.

Some of them vented hisses, curses and execrations at Kit, and shook their fists at him threateningly, while others did not manifest any particular dislike for him, even though they dared not, did they choose, exhibit any sympathy for him.

Kit received all the glances sent at him with the greatest indifference, though memorizing nearly every face that was particularly noticeable, and allowing a faint smile to wreath his lips when he saw a face wherein pity was expressed.

Thus they passed down the street until they arrived at Don Juan's mansion, a pretentious and imposing structure of stone.

This was entered at the front, and the march continued, not only through a long hallway, but into a passage which ran back into the mountain.

While passing through the hall Kit caught a glimpse of a pretty, girlish face, looking out of a side door; but it was only a glimpse, for Don Juan uttered a curse and took a step toward the door, which was speedily closed.

"I wonder if that is Bertie Bird?" was the thought that flashed across Kit's mind. "If so, she's a beauty, and no mistake."

They soon paused in front of a door of iron grating at one side of the mountain passage, which opened into a dungeon, which the hand of man had hewn and blasted out, probably for the same purpose for which it was used. The door was unlocked, and Kit ushered in, after which the portal was locked on the outside.

"There! I wish you merry times in your snug cell," Juan said, sneeringly, as he peered through the gratings. "When I have devised some suitable plan to test your bravery, I'll drop in to see you."

Then he retired, the Danites following, and Kit was left to make the best of his situation.

"It's better than I expected at first," he said to himself. "When they surprised me, in the church, I reckoned they'd do for me at once. As it is I've a chance for my life yet."

The dungeon was hewn from the solid rock, and the iron door was of sufficient strength to resist the attack of even a battering-ram.

What chance was there, then, for escape?

Kit looked the situation over as best he was able in the semi-gloom, and concluded that the chances were decidedly poor.

Still he was not a man to despair, and threw himself down upon a bundle of dried grass in one corner, to take his ease, while matters developed.

No one came to disturb his thoughts until after a long while, when he concluded that it must be growing close to-night, as it was quite dark in the passage without.

Then one of the Danites came and poked a couple of pieces of raw deer-meat in between the slats.

"Thar!" he growled. "Ef that ain't good enough for you, I opine ye kin go without."

"Much obleeged!" Kit replied, sarcastically. "I've eaten raw meat before, and I opine I can do it again. Suppose you can't turn on the gas, eh?"

"I reckon not!" was the response. "You'll get light enuff when the Prophet gets at you."

"Your Prophet be hanged!" Kit said coolly. "I've seen better men than he is used to clean street-crossings out East."

The Danite stalked off without replying. A smell of the meat satisfied him that it was fresh, and palatable, but how was he to eat it without the use of his hands, which were still securely fastened behind his back.

He was considering the matter when something struck him in the back, and fell to the rocky floor with a metallic ring.

Turning in surprise he peered sharply about the dungeon. But he looked in vain. He could discover no aperture or crevice, through which the missile, which proved to be an ivory-handled dirk knife, could have been dropped or thrown.

"Well, I'm shot if I ain't much obliged for the favor," he said aloud, as he gazed at the knife. "You needn't be bashful about entering, whoever sent in this visiting-card."

But there was no answer.

The donator of the knife, where'er he or she might be concealed, evidently preferred to hide from sight and keep silent.

Lying down upon his back, over the knife, he succeeded in cutting the bonds which confined his wrists, giving him the use of all his limbs.

To attack the deer meat, was a job he was quite willing to perform. Though raw, it was sweet, and he had no difficulty in making a good square meal.

He then lay down, to ponder over the mystery of how the knife found its way into the dungeon, but, giving it up, he dropped off into a restless sleep.

When he awoke it was with a start.

He opened his eyes, and uttered a cry!

A face was bending close to his, the eyes peering at him, searchingly!

He remembered the face instantly—he had seen it when coming through the hall;—it was the pretty girl!

CHAPTER VI.

QUEEN.

HE beheld a young woman of some nineteen years, evidently, who, though rather short of stature, was well formed, and neatly attired.

In face she was very pretty, having finely chiseled features, a tempting mouth and magnetic brown eyes that sparkled, brilliantly. Her hair was long and heavy, flowing in a flossy brown wave over her shoulders.

Comparing her face with that of Old Meg, the witch, Kit was wondering if this fair girl could be the ogre's own flesh and blood, when she suddenly spoke:

"You are not frightened are you?"

"Oh! no—I am simply startled," he replied.

"I certainly was not expecting you."

"Of course you were not. Had you been expecting me, ten to one I shouldn't have come."

"Indeed! I suppose I have you to thank for the loan of the knife. Will you believe me of being mystified, by telling me where you hurled the knife from?"

"Hardly; I must first know who you are, and what brings you to Gold-Flake. I may be able to help you, or I may not, as the case happens to be."

"Well—my name is Cyclone Kit," the prisoner responded. "I am an adventurer, with little other object in life, than to wander about, and enjoy myself."

"You deny that you had an object in coming to this place?"

"Oh! no. I have a purpose in most every thing I do."

"Then, what was the purpose of your coming here?"

"I decline to tell."

"You are foolish. Listen to me, and you will admit it. Do you know who I am?"

"No. If I were to guess, I should say you were not Bertie Bird!"

A look of surprise came over her face, at this.

"No, I am not!" she said, decidedly. "What do you know of *her*?"

"Not very much—simply that such a person is in existence, and is about to become the latest Mrs. Cordiz!"

"So rumor has it; but it shall never be—*never!*" and the girl stamped her foot emphatically on the floor. "I am Juan Cordiz's last wife, and the last one he shall ever have upon this earth."

"You his wife?"

"Unfortunately and much against my will, yes. I was forced by my parents to wed him not three months ago, but he found that in me he had got hold of a tigress."

"You have no love for his prophetship, then?"

"Ha! ha! no; nor he for me. We hate each other about as cordially as two humans can, I fancy. It is only a matter of time when one of us kills the other."

"Why do you stay here, then?" Kit asked, thoughtfully.

"Because I can't well leave without money. And, besides this, I am not going to leave. I am going to change places with Juan Cordiz—I am going to take this valley and drive out these Mormons one by one, until the town shall know a new life and a better people."

"A good resolve, worthy of being carried out, I should say, if you are able to do it," Kit allowed. "I guess you lack the strength, do you not?"

"Not so much as you might suppose. There are a few people, thank God, who have privately renounced the Mormon faith, and will stand by me—people who were captured and pressed into the life they now live. I do not need a great many more sturdy volunteers ere I shall be able to make a strike for the right."

"And you want to add me to your list, eh?"

"I do. You are a man whom I would like to put in command."

"Well, I will think about it. I fear that, though your scheme is feasible, it will fail through not having sufficient strength."

"You will think otherwise when you see my backers. Though only a child yet, Queen Cordiz has a level head and a long sight."

"Does Don Juan know anything of this proposed mutiny?"

"Not for certain, I guess, though I have an idea he suspects trouble, from the fact that he is very rude and even brutal toward me. He can hardly know anything of the scheme, however, as I have enjoined the strictest secrecy."

"If he should anticipate you, how would you go to work to get out of the scrape?"

"Get out of it the best way I could and abide the consequences. I must go, now. I merely come to let you know that you had more than one chance for your life. You can think it over, and I'll see you again ere long. If you will face the dungeon door a minute, I will not disturb you any longer."

Cyclone Kit obeyed, but kept alert his sense of hearing.

A moment later he glanced around and Queen Cordiz was gone, even though he had not heard a sound denoting her departure, while the walls, floor and ceiling of the rocky cell remained, to all appearances, as before—solid and unyielding.

The day following that night was a wild and stormy one without, and Don Juan remained indoors in his comfortably appointed library—a large room carpeted with wolf-skins and furnished with a few chairs, a table and desk-bookcase, which contained a number of books and papers.

The Prophet sat in an easy-chair, his heels elevated upon the table, and a pipe in his mouth, from which he sent clouds of smoke rolling ceilingward, as he was buried in deep thought.

"Even a king may occupy his throne, and be ill at ease!" he muttered, a frown coming over his face. "Things are not working too smoothly, here, in Gold-Flake, and something tells me that there is trouble in the near future, but in what shape it will come, I cannot say. Of one thing I am satisfied, however—there is a suspicion among the people that I am watching a ripe chance to get possession of the fund of gold stored in the vault, and decamp with it. Some one of those having gold stored there, constantly is in the vicinity, when I go there. Perhaps it is well for them that they are so careful, for I fancy I could, with all that

wealth, enjoy myself better in the East than here. First, however, to wed the girl, Bertie Bird, shall be my object. I swore years ago that I would in this way have my revenge upon the witch. Besides, the girl is much superior, in all respects, to any other woman in Gold-Flake, except Queen. Curse that girl! She's a fury, and she hates me worse than poison. She must be watched, for she is smart enough, and vindictive enough, to do me immeasurable evil. Ha! who knocks, there? Come in!" he added, glancing toward the door.

It opened, and a stranger entered—a man whom the Don had never seen before, to his recollection. He was a tall, well-dressed personage, of good figure and a noticeably handsome face, which was set off advantageously by a pair of handsome eyes, and a finely-shaped mouth, shaded by a sandy mustache—altogether a person of more than ordinary personal attractions.

"Have I the honor of addressing the Prophet, Don Juan Cordiz?" he asked, doffing his hat, as he paused, near the door.

"You have, sir!" that individual replied, as he motioned to a seat. "Be seated and state your business."

"This will explain to you who I am," and he tossed a sealed letter upon the table, which the Don found was addressed to himself.

Tearing it open, he glanced over its contents, hurriedly.

It ran as follows:

"SALT LAKE CITY June 18—

"*Prophet Juan, of the Gold-Flake Mormon Church:*

"The bearer of this note is one Arthur Carlson, a rich New York gentleman, who has come to this country in search of the heir to a piece of property in the East. From some facts which have come to my notice, I concluded you might be able to assist him, and therefore send him to you.

"Yours truly, BRIGHAM YOUNG."

As he finished reading, Cordiz looked at the stranger, an amused smile playing upon his stern face.

"Young man," he said, "your supposed cleverness is the bight of folly."

"Why?" Carlson asked, growing pale. "Is the recommend not in all respects satisfactory?"

"Of course not. In the first place it is a forgery. In the second place—"

A hard glitter came into the handsome man's eyes.

"How can you prove it is a forgery?" he interrupted, fiercely.

"Oh! it's proof enough in itself. In the first place, I am a renegade sheep from Brigham's flock, and we being deadly enemies, he would never address me at all, much less as a *Prophet*. Brigham does not allow another genuine Mormon Prophet to exist, aside from himself. I am a Prophet over the people, here, who recognize me as such, but no further. That is how I know the imposition you would practice on me."

Carlson's teeth went hard together.

"Knowledge is power, so I must admit the forgery. I knew of no other way I could gain access to this place, so I fixed up the forgery as a passport."

"Well, sir, having arrived so far, now what is your business?"

"I will tell you, if you will grant me your attention. You will probably recognize some of the points of the case, by having heard of them before."

"To begin with: years ago—it matters not just how many—the daughter of a wealthy and aristocratic New England family eloped with a worthless laboring man, and despite the fact that expert detectives were sent out after them, they eluded pursuit, and escaped to the wilds of the West. Here they have remained, unheard from, until about six months ago, when the man, Joe Bird by name, wrote back to one of his Eastern associates of former days, disclosing his whereabouts.

"He wrote that he was the inmate of a Mormon village, where he was doing well, and had several wives—that his first wife, and his daughter, Bertie by name, were still living; the latter in the Mormon settlement, and the former a raving maniac in the mountains. Shortly prior to the reception of this news, the father and only surviving parent of Bird's first wife—whose maiden name was Margaret Mather—made his will and less than a week afterward died.

"His will disposed of a snug little fortune, as follows: To the child of his only daughter, Margaret Bird by name, if such a child be living, he bequeathed two thirds of his entire wealth; to Cleve Carlson, if he be living, the remaining one-third, providing said Cleve Car-

lison found, courted and wed said child, be it a girl, of said Margaret Mather Bird. In case Cleve Carlson be not alive, the third third to go to Arthur Carlson, providing he fulfill the same terms exacted of Cleve Carlson, should said child of Margaret Bird be a girl. In event of no female heir being born to said Margaret Bird up to the date of the publication of the will, or in event of either Cleve or Arthur Carlson's not wedding such female heir of Margaret Bird, should one exist, within three years after date of will—then the third third to go to a local church society.

"As the third third of the fortune my friend left behind him, amounts to the sum of about thirty thousand dollars, you can readily see that I am anxious to meet the daughter of Joe and Margaret Bird."

"I should presume so," Cordiz remarked, gruffly. "And so you have come here with a view of capturing this prize, have you?"

"You've hit it, exactly."

"But how about this Cleve Carlson?"

"Oh! he's not in my way. He was a reckless, harmless sort of a fellow, who has been roving about the West for some years past, and at last accounts had been shot and killed by the Indians, down in Arizona, thus leaving me master of the situation. I presume this Bertie Bird is still a resident of this place, and is to be seen?"

"Well, I presume not!" the Don replied, with a sneer. "If the information will give you any satisfaction, Miss Bird is already engaged to me, and is about to add to her happiness, shortly, in becoming one of my several wives!"

Arthur Carlson uttered an oath.

"Your wife?" he ejaculated. "By heaven, no—this must not be, sir!"

"Allow me to know best!" Cordiz said fiercely.

"When any one has to say what shall, or what shall not be done, in this town, I presume you'll learn it is always myself. You have come here on a fool's errand, young man, and according to our laws, you cannot again leave this valley, which you have the freedom of as long as you mind your business and earn your own living. If you become in any way meddlesome or obnoxious I shall hand you over to the Danites. So you can go now, and let me see no more of you."

White with rage, Carlson arose.

"I will go," he said, "and I'll look to it that you never marry her whom I have come so far to secure."

Once outside, however, a more furious fit struck him.

"The outlook is devilish bad, but I'll not give up. His Prophetship will find that I am a worse man to deal with than my genteel appearance implies."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE RING!

AFTER the departure of Arthur Carlson from the Cordiz mansion, the Don sat awhile longer in his easy-chair, evidently in an unenviable frame of mind, judging by the frown of displeasure that clouded his brow.

"Curse the fellow! He must not see the girl, for she is the very one to fall in love with a baby-face like his. I must enjoin harsher measures to prevent so many strangers entering this gulch. It is evident that the witch, Old Meg, is growing less particular how she serves me."

He rapped smartly upon the floor with his cane; a door of an adjoining room opened, and a queer dwarfed figure appeared, whose shaggy-haired head was double the ordinary size, and whose eyes were made to match and were wild in their glare.

"Pietro!" the Don said, speaking sharply to him, "how is the bird of Bird's this morning?"

"Shure, she's as sassy an independant as iver, yer honor," Pietro replied, with a strong Irish accent, which proved that he was not an Italian, as his name would seem to imply.

"Her independence will have to be toned down a little, I fear," Cordiz said, darkly. "Show her into my presence, Pietro."

With a nod of satisfaction the dwarf disappeared, and soon returned, half dragging by the wrist a young and pretty maiden of some seventeen summers—a fair-haired lassie, whose face was fresh and beautiful, whose gray-black eyes shone lustrously, whose whole appearance was neat, refined and intelligent.

"Unhand me, ruffian!" she gasped, as Pietro pushed her forward into the Don's presence.

"Sir?"—turning to the Prophet—"have you no manhood or manly honor, that you permit me to be abused by that misshapen wretch?"

"None whatever, miss, until you are tamed sufficiently well to know who your master is!"

was the unfeeling response. "I demanded that you should marry me, and you very unwisely refused. I then gave you over to Pietro's care until you should be conquered."

A scornful smile flitted over Bertie Bird's face.

"Do you have any hope that you will ever be able to conquer me, Juan Cordiz?" she demanded, with sarcasm.

"Of course I shall," he replied, complacently. "I've a great faculty of breaking in young fillies, like you. I dare to presume I shall not have much further trouble with you, as I am arranging to have the ceremony take place in the amphitheater this evening, be you willing, or not. Preceding the ceremony I shall enter the ring and fight a noted gladiator and sport, Cyclone Kit by name, and prove to you that in the way of manly accomplishments Juan Cordiz knows no equal. If I succeed in killing him, Elder Magold will unite us. It will avail you nothing to whimper or protest—my will is law, and I will have my way! Pietro, you may remove her."

"Oh! you monster!" Bertie gasped, as the dwarf seized her once more by the wrist, and dragged her back to her place of imprisonment, in an adjoining room.

After she was gone, Don Juan seized pen, ink and paper, and proceeded to write, rapidly.

When he had finished the following was the result:

"TO-NIGHT!

Grand Entertainment at Amphitheater, Gold-Flake. The Right Reverend Prophet of the Mormon Church, Juan Cordiz, will, in public, take unto himself another wife, in the person of Miss Bertie Bird.

"Previous to the Marriage Ceremony, Prophet Juan will meet in battle a noted Gentile bravo, Cyclone Kit by title. A general attendance desired."

"There! that will fill the bill," the villain muttered, as he perused the contents of the paper. "I'll do for the long-haired foe, to-night, and then turn my attention to the latest arrival. I fancy he is more to be feared than the other."

That night arrived. It was dark and gloomy, the wind soughing down into the basin, in fitful gusts.

As soon as darkness began to gather thick, and lamplight was a necessity, the citizens began to assemble within the amphitheater, of which mention has previously been made. Throughout the town notices had that day been posted, concerning the forthcoming entertainment, and of course, as it was under the auspices of the Prophet, the whole population turned out, and the raised seats surrounding the ring were well filled, including several box stalls always reserved for the elders. One of these boxes was occupied by Don Juan's right-hand man, Pietro, and his prisoner, Bertie Bird, who had been warned that if she did not conduct herself according to directions she had been given by Juan, Pietro would cut her throat, and toss her out into the ring.

Knowing by experience from childhood, that Cordiz never hesitated at crime, the poor girl dared not disobey—indeed, she knew that it would do her no good to disobey or offer protest against the will of the Prophet, as all of his Mormon flock were bound to support him in all his views and uphold him in his actions, no matter what they were.

The "entertainment" as the Don had announced it, was to begin at eight o'clock, and long before that hour arrived, the interior of the amphitheater, which in summer time was used for religious services, presented an appearance at once novel and characteristic, reminding one not a little of the similar amphitheater scenes of the Romans and Spaniards, of ages past and gone.

The tiers of seats were thronged by an eager and expectant people, who looked strangely rough and uncouth, in the wavering glare of the light of a hundred resinous torches.

Around the outskirts of the ring below, stationed about a yard apart, were a number of slouch-hatted, masked men, attired in red shirts, black pants and top boots, and armed with rifles. These were Mormon Danites, and constituted a guard, while at the same time they occupied positions in a sort of sentry boxes where they could not be attacked.

About eight o'clock a gong was sounded, and Cyclone Kit was brought forward into the ring by a couple of roughs, who immediately retired, leaving him the center of attraction for many pairs of eyes.

He had been specially prepared for the ordeal he was forced to undergo. He was stripped to

the waist, while his lower garments consisted of a pair of tight-fitting buckskin pantaloons, and a pair of moccasins and leggings, gayly trimmed with ribbons to match.

His long wealth of hair had been tied up into a tuft on top of his head, Indian style, and gave him a wild, unnatural appearance.

Around his waist was a belt, containing a single dirk knife of stout make and razor edge.

After he was left in the ring by the two men who had ushered him in, Cyclone Kit stood gazing about him in curiosity, not knowing exactly what to expect.

He saw the many strange and varied faces that were turned toward him with expressions of expectancy, and knew that they were ready to applaud the heartiest when he should have to fight the hardest for life. He had no pity to expect from them, who were possessed of a dislike for all declared Gentiles; he knew that it was next to useless to expect mercy at their hands.

He saw the guards in the sentry-boxes, and knew they had been placed there to shoot him down, should he attempt to escape from the ring.

He saw among the faces in the audience that of Queen Cordiz, caught her eye, and received a simple nod.

Then he saw a door open at one side of the ring, and a savage-looking bloodhound leap forth, while at the same time the audience gave a shout of approval.

A glitter came into Cyclone Kit's eyes, excited by a spirit of indignation, that these people, who claimed to be civilized, should delight to see a man matched against a wild beast.

Waiting until the dog was half-way to him, he raised his hand above his head, and gave vent to a sharp, peculiar cry.

The bloodhound, whose eyes glared redly, paused with a growl and licked his chops hungrily, but made no move to advance further.

Quickly taking advantage of this respite, Cyclone Kit jerked the knife from his belt, and hurled it at the savage brute.

True to its aim, the point of the blade struck the poor animal midway between the eyes, and nearly cleft its skull in twain.

Without even a howl it fell to the ground dead, and Kit stepped gracefully forward and extracted the knife, after which he waved his hand at the audience triumphantly.

If he had expected applause, which he did not, he would have been disappointed, for only a faintly perceptible murmur of surprise escaped the spectators, and all was then blank silence for the space of a minute, when a stern voice cried:

"Turn in the bears!"

Kit looked quickly in the direction whence the voice came, and saw the Don standing upon a box, near one of the sentry-boxes, looking the picture of rage incarnate.

"Yes, turn loose whatever you choose, old Sardine!" Kit shouted back, good-naturedly. "I've just struck my gait, now, and can kill you off enough meat in five minutes, to last you a week, big hog as you are."

"We shall see!" the ruffian ruler retorted, with an oath. "You have received but the first installment."

So Kit perceived, when he saw the door open again, and a regular army of huge grizzly, bears came lumbering out into the ring.

For once in his life, he realized that he was confronted by danger with which no man could successfully hope to cope.

There were six of the bears, and every one of them huge in size, and judging by their gaunt appearance, on the verge of starvation.

They were growling among themselves, and as they came forward the largest of the lot reared erect.

Thunders of applause went up from the audience, as they saw the terrible odds the young Gentile had to contend with. Bertie Bird, in her box, realized that the brave fellow could never conquer the bears if not properly armed.

Instantly seizing a revolver from the belt of Pietro, who sat by her side, she threw it into the ring, behind Cyclone Kit.

So intent was the audience in watching the approaching bears, that the act was not noticed, even by Pietro himself, until Kit had possessed himself of the weapon, and firmly stood his ground, with the weapon cocked, and ready, in his grasp.

"Stop! stop!" Don Juan roared, fiercely; "don't dare to shoot those bears."

"Shut up, you devil, or I'll shoot you!" Kit cried, turning upon him so fiercely, that the Prophet dodged down out of sight, at which

there was a perceptible titter among the spectators.

Immediately, Kit began to run like a deer around the outer edge of the ring.

The object in this was to get the bears to chase him, in which device he was not unsuccessful.

They immediately gave chase, one following the other in single file, the biggest bear leading.

Being an expert runner Kit had no difficulty in keeping ahead of them as long as they made no "breaks" or "crosscuts."

Two or three circuits about the ring were made, when he suddenly closed in on the rear bear, and drove his dirk to the hilt into the top of his neck; the next instant leaping over him he attacked the fifth in a like manner, and then the fourth third and second, amid thunders of applause from the electrified spectators!

The whole wonderful action had occupied but an instant of time, with such lightning celerity did the daring beast-killer move and strike!

Even Don Cordiz could but stand and yell and clap his hands, so strongly did the great act impress him.

Every blow had been deadly fatal, for neither beast went many steps after the knife had been buried and withdrawn from the back of their necks, and all dropped dead, ere the applause had died out.

Cyclone Kit did not tackle the last and largest bear in this way, but leaped to the center of the ring, and allowed the giant bruin to take his own course.

After lumbering around the ring until he came to his first prostrated companion, the monster halted, and reared upon his hind feet with a growl of anger.

Then, seeming to comprehend that Cyclone Kit had been the author of the wholesale slaughter, he rushed savagely after him.

But Kit was after him also!

Firmly standing his ground he raised his revolver and fired a single shot—then walked over to one side of the ring and sat down upon one of the lifeless bears.

The big bear staggered as he received the deadly bullet—tottered unsteadily, and then, losing his balance, went plunging forward to the ground, from which he never was to rise in life again.

The bullet had pierced his brain, entering through one of his eyes!

As soon as the bear was floored, Kit rose, waved his hand to the audience, and turning to Don Juan, who stood upon his perch like one stupefied, he cried out:

"Have you any more live stock you want to dispose of, you holy old brute?"

"You will find out!" the Don roared, leaping forward into the ring. "I'll see whether you can cope with me now. Guard, bring two good swords at once!"

"All right," responded Kit, evidently pleased with the turn affairs were taking. "I am good at hog-sticking!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CARLISON TRIES HIS HAND.

"HERE come the weapons now. Throw them on the ground, Pierre, and let the Gentile take his choice."

The man obeyed, and then departed.

"Pick out your weapon!" the Don ordered, pointing to two handsome swords, which lay between them. "It is the last weapon you will ever use; let it be said you had a choice of the swords."

"See: I pick out the slenderest blade and leave you the finer one. Take it, and square yourself, if you wish to fight with a man, you miserable old rip!" retorted Kit.

The Don threw off his coat, and seizing the remaining sword, at once stood on guard.

Kit simply glanced at his weapon.

The two men then advanced! Only a few paces—then the clash! clash! clash! and ring of steel; the battle had commenced.

Knowing, as they did, that Don Juan Cordiz was a most expert swordsman, the excited throng rose to their feet and gazed down into the ring with eager expectancy.

In the mean time, when the eyes of all were turned upon the scene in the ring below, another man was alert to the execution of a prearranged plan.

To reach the private boxes it was necessary to enter a narrow hallway from the street.

Waiting until he saw that every one in the amphitheater had no eyes but for the scene in the ring, Arthur Carlson slipped from his position on one of the seats and hurriedly left the

building, to re-enter it again by way of the hall and make his way toward the boxes.

"It must be she that is so jealously guarded in the first private box," he muttered, since it is announced that the marriage is to take place to-night. And, if such is the case, I've a notion that the Mormon Prophet will lose his prospective bride!"

A walk up the hallway brought him to the door opening into the box occupied by Pietro and Bertie Bird.

This door was not entirely closed, and Carlson was enabled to get a partial view of them and note the fact that the attention of both was directed to the battle going on in the ring below, the dwarf at the moment being in the act of speaking.

"Och! shure the Don will be affer gettin' tha divil!" he was saying, evidently addressing Miss Bertie. "He be a good 'un wid the sword, it is true, but divil a wan has he iver tackled of the loikes of his prisen't antagonist."

"Would to Heaven that he gets punished, the brute!" Bertie replied, indignantly.

"Och! sorry's the bastin' you'd be affer gettin' did he hear you say thim words. If the loikes of him gets kilt, I suppose you'll be marryin' the loikes of meself, me darlint, and es-capin' from this big-family city?"

"Oh! undoubtedly!" was the sarcastic reply. "You are such an improvement on the other ruffian, that I almost fancy I see myself getting ready to elope with you."

"In that case, I'd better prevent such rashness, as you can escape without all that sacrifice!" Carlson cried, in a low tone, as he stepped quickly into the box and presented a cocked revolver at Pietro's head. "Miss Bird, I have come to rescue you from this living tomb and restore you to your rightful position. Will you go with me?"

"No, she won't do a wan av the loikes, sur!" Pietro protested, frightened and belligerent at the same time.

"Shut up, or I'll doctor your eye with a lead pill if you raise any disturbance. Keep your mouth shut and I'll not hurt you. Will you fly from this place with me, Miss Bird?"

"Oh! no! no!" Bertie gasped, shrinking away. "I do not know you—you are a stranger to me! I cannot go with you."

"Nonsense! let not such a thing hinder you. Life-long misery stares you in the face, unless you improve this opportunity and escape to a place where I can explain the mission that brings me here in search of you. If you delay, you are lost, for the marriage ceremony is announced to take place immediately after the duel."

"But how do I know you are speaking the truth? How do I know but what you are trying to lure me into some terrible trap?" Bertie demanded, suspiciously.

"You have my word of honor as a gentleman, dear lady, that I mean well for you."

Bertie was silent for a moment, her eyes attracted to the scene in the ring below, where the antagonists were doing some light fencing, neither one of them appearing to have gained an advantage over the other.

"How would we escape without danger of being retaken?" she finally asked, turning to Carlson. "This bloodhound of the Don will give us trouble."

"Not the least whatever. He will go right along with us until we are safe out of hearing, then we'll send back word by him to the Don to the effect that 'there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.' Come, sir, rise and proceed quietly a few few paces in advance of us, or I'll kill you quicker than scat, and escape with Miss Bird in the bargain!"

"Holy murther!" Pietro exclaimed, as he arose, with evident unwillingness; "d'ye think tha loikes av me a fool? I'll be decent, av course I will!"

"See that you are!" Carlson said, warningly. "Come, Miss Bird—now's our time, before we are discovered."

With evident reluctance Bertie obeyed, following Carlson; and the trio hurried down the hall and out into the night.

At the door Carlson faced Pietro about, and said:

"Now, sir, the likeliest thing you can do is get back to the place you started from—the box—in the quickest and quietest manner you know how. I shall listen here at the door until I hear you safely there. If you try any funny business, you're a dead man."

Pietro uttered a grunt, and made haste to obey. He was an arrant coward at heart when it came to his own safety, and was glad to escape thus easily.

Carlson watched him until he disappeared, then he turned quickly to Bertie, who stood near by.

"Come!" he exclaimed; "we must run for it now, ere the Irishman raises the alarm and the Mormons give chase," and he seized her arm and pulled her swiftly along.

"Where are you going to take me?" Bertie gasped, many misgivings for her safety assailing her.

"To a safe retreat I to-day discovered within the confines of this gulch. We cannot leave by either secret pass to-night, for the reason that both passes are doubly guarded. Do not fear—we shall safely elude the pursuit, if pursuit is made."

How true this was, whether to believe it or not, poor Bertie did not know. She had started forth with him, and must follow his guidance until it was too late or until he had proven himself her friend.

As fast as was possible he hurried her along, and in due time they came to the chaparral thicket, which filled up the upper end of the gulch and made it almost impassable.

Into this jungle Carlson led the way.

So thick was the growth that it was impossible to make rapid progress, but finally they came to a sort of opening or glade, where the roar of falling water reached their ears.

In front of them was a waterfall of considerable width and height, pouring down from over a rocky ledge on the mountain side into a deep basin, from which it escaped by way of the channel that ran down through the length of the locked valley. Directly across the receiving basin of the waterfall was a fallen tree. It was a large, long pine, that had evidently been down some years, and one end of it was hidden from view under the falls, as Bertie could see, dark as it was.

Carlson immediately drew an immense rubber blanket from under a rock near at hand.

"Our snug retreat for the present is behind those falls," he said, "and to reach it I shall have to carry you across that log in under the falls. To accomplish it, I shall have to raise you in my arms, and we shall have to have the blanket, which I brought with me from the East, over our heads, to save getting wet. It will take but a second to pass through the sheet of water, when we once get to it, so don't be afraid."

He raised the bewildered girl in his strong arms, and then pulled the huge waterproof over their heads and wrapped it around them.

Then stepping upon the log, in a few moments he disappeared with his charge in under the falls.

As he had told Bertie, it took but a second to dart through the thin sheet of water, but it was an awful second to the terrified girl.

Carlson set her on her feet and threw off the blanket which had shielded them.

All was Stygian gloom, but after fumbling around a moment, Carlson lit a match, and then a pine knot, which he thrust into a crevice in the rocky wall at one side.

Now that the scene was illuminated, Bertie could see that they were in the mouth of a large cave, that yawned just beneath the falls. It had evidently been washed out by water at some remote period, and ran back into the mountain for a considerable distance.

There was no furniture whatever, proving that the place had not been used as a resort.

"Well, how do you like the looks of the retreat? Do you imagine they will find us here?" Carlson asked, a smile upon his face.

"Not unless Juan Cordiz knows of the place, or the bloodhounds trail us," she replied. "How long am I to stay here, sir?"

"Until I can make satisfactory arrangements to leave the town," was the reply. "I reckon we are safe from Mormon vengeance, and I shall not make a move until I can make a sure one."

"But what do you intend to do with me, sir, after you make this sure move you speak of?" Bertie demanded, facing him, and gazing at him inquiringly.

"Well, that depends somewhat upon circumstances," he replied, with a mocking coolness of demeanor that made the blood chill in her veins; "it depends altogether on circumstances, my dear. If you agree to marry me when we get once into civilized parts, we shall go immediately East, to take possession of an immense fortune that has fell jointly to you and me by the recent death of your uncle. Instead of becoming the fifth or sixth wife of a Mormon, you must become the first wife of a gentleman—that's me, Arthur Carlson, Esquire."

CHAPTER IX.

WHO THE VICTOR WAS.

LET us return to the ring in the amphitheater. For nearly half an hour had the two gladiators confronted each other and fenced in a way that indicated their thorough acquaintance with the sword exercise. For a time it locked as if they were too well matched for anything but a draw duel.

But to an observing outsider it would have become apparent that the Don was getting out of "wind," but Kit appeared just as fresh as when he commenced, and if anything, more agile and limber.

"Come! come!" he said, as he perceived that the spectators were growing impatient for a break in the monotony, "are you not going to fulfill your promise to the people? They are getting tired of having to wait so long to see you kill me, as you declared your intention to be."

"Never fear! I'll kill you yet!" the Prophet growled, savagely, as he made a fierce lunge. "You d—"

He never finished the utterance, at least not at that juncture, for Cyclone parried his blow with a powerful stroke which wrenched the Don's weapon from his grasp and sent it flying half-way across the ring, leaving him defenseless.

The next instant he received a crack alongside his head from the flat of Kit's sword that tumbled him upon his back with surprising quickness.

Placing his foot on the Don's breast, Cyclone Kit held his sword ready to finish the job before him.

A thunder of applause broke from the audience. They had of one accord expected a different termination; they were astonished at the prowess of this Gentile stranger; they could but give vent to their admiration of his wonderful skill.

"Merey!" Don Juan gasped, glaring up into the face of his antagonist.

"Hal! you beg for mercy, do you?" Kit replied. "Do you think you have got enough?"

"I should not beg for quarter if I did not," was the gruff reply.

"Well, sir, when I have your promise that I can remain at liberty in your town as long as I please, unmolested, and come and go when I please, you can reasonably consider that I shall spare your life, for the present. Otherwise, you can rise and grasp your sword, and believe I shall not let up on you so easily, a second time. What say you—if I spare you, am I to have the freedom of the town?"

"No—never!" Cordiz gritted, struggling to get up—but he might as well have made no effort at all, because the foot of the Gentle gladiator held him firmly down, until he ceased his struggles, when Kit stepped to one side, and allowed him to arise.

"Now, sir!" he cried, "get your sword, and come at me. It is either you or I, now! This is no country subject to monarchy—I allow there ain't no locked kingdoms where a fellow hasn't the right to go, if he chooses—and, therefore, we shall see whether I haven't the right to stay here in Gold-Flake!"

"Yes, we will see!" Juan roared, picking up his blade. "I'm ruler of this town, and when I say a man cannot stay or depart, I reckon my word is law."

With a cry of rage, he rushed forward, and steel once more met steel, with rapid ringing clashes.

Thrust, parry, feint; there was now no child's play about the skilled and scientific fencing. Dead earnest were the two antagonists, each evidently intent upon laying the other out.

The spectators watched with feverish interest—their whole minds and souls seeming to be centered in the scene below them.

"Clash! clash! clash!"

Then a cry of mortal pain, as Juan Cordiz staggered back, while at the same moment Cyclone Kit drew his weapon from the Mormon's breast, and with a wave of his hand, as the Don fell to the ground, Cyclone Kit turned and strode from the ring and out of the amphitheater, his sword ready for use upon any one who should presume to blockade his way.

There were no cheers, this time, until the gladiator was gone; then a feeble applause went up, but quickly died out.

Don Juan still lay where he had fallen, and it looked quite evident that Gold-Flake had lost, or was about to lose its Prophet and ruler.

The sensation day in Gold-Flake had fairly dawned, the morning after the gladiatorial contest.

People were wildly excited.

Upon a bed, in his mansion, Juan Cordiz lay, a helpless and mortally wounded man—so said the advices sent forth by the only doctor in the town, who had ordered that the Prophet be left in perfect quiet.

Roaming about the town, with as much apparent unconcern as though he had been guilty of no offense, was Cyclone Kit.

He made no advances to anybody—spoke to nobody unless they spoke to him, and, armed to the teeth, seemed perfectly at ease as to his personal safety.

This, too, in face of the fact that the town was in literally a boiling state of commotion.

People of both sexes were gathered in knots, here and there, engaged in excited discussions, as was evident by the wild gesticulations they made; a crowd of the same was constantly entering and leaving the temple; but what it all meant, Cyclone Kit made no attempt to pry into, as he believed it did not concern him.

About noon he chanced to meet Queen Cordiz near the chaparral, in the vicinity of which he was strolling.

She put on a pleasant smile, and stopped to speak to him.

"You did nobly in furtherance of my plans, last night," she said, enthusiastically. "I am getting my trap ready to spring at a moment's notice. Why didn't you kill him, and have done with it?"

"That was not my intention!" Kit replied. "I wanted to make him suffer as he made another suffer—the inhuman brute. Do they think he will peg out?"

"So the doctor reports. Probably he is right. I, as one of his wives, can say I heartily hope so. You knew this man, before coming here, then?"

"By reputation only. A year ago, if you remember, his Danites attacked a small emigrant train, and murdered every one except a beautiful girl, named Lily Lee, and her brother. The girl was brought here, together with her brother, and both were brutally treated by Juan Cordiz—the girl so brutally that she died, while the boy succeeded in escaping, and lived long enough to tell me of their wrongs. He also told me that he had made the discovery that this same Juan Cordiz had been a former rejected suitor of his mother, and that was the reason why Cordiz had caused them to suffer such inhuman treatment. The dead girl had previously been an intimate acquaintance of mine, and on hearing of her sad fate I swore vengeance on the Don, and set out to accomplish it. How well I have succeeded you have seen, and you probably recall the particular instance of the Don's ruffianism, which I have been speaking of?"

Queen nodded, with a shudder.

"I shall never forget it, or the poor victim," she said, a tear, springing into either eye, "and I must beg leave to admire you for avenging her wrongs. Do you know where Bertie Bird is?"

"No. Is she gone?" Kit asked, quickly.

"Yes. Nothing has been seen of her or the Irishman, whom the Don called Pietro, since they occupied a box at the amphitheater last night. There is evidently foul play somewhere."

"I am sorry to hear this. It is certain that she is not within the confines of the gulch basin?"

"It is certain she has not left it. The guards were doubled last night, but deny any knowledge of her whereabouts."

"She must be somewhere in concealment then."

"That is hardly probable, as the Don has ordered every known place of concealment searched, but nothing of her has been found."

"Humph! It is singular. I should have liked to see the girl."

"And why so? What was she to you?" Queen asked, quickly.

"Nothing to me in particular, except that I was concerned in her welfare by promise to another."

"Ha! you are the agent of the witch of the mountains, then?" the young woman accused.

"Well, yes, inasmuch as I promised to rescue her daughter for her, if I could do so. I should presume that you are not possessed of a friendly spirit toward the girl."

"You are right. I hate her worse than poison!" Queen cried, her dusky eyes flashing fire. "She has about the same amount of affection for me."

"Why is this dislike for each other, may I ask?"

"Oh! I don't know, more than it is a sort of

natural repugnance. And then, too, before I married the Don, we both were in love with a young prisoner of the Don's, and grew to more thoroughly dislike each other through jealousy."

"I guess you are of a pretty jealous and changeable temper," Kit remarked a little sarcastically. "By the way, what do you think the opinion of the people is toward me—what are their intentions?"

"My people are favorable; they are willing that you should command them in the capacity of leader, in their proposed insurrection, in case you are willing to accept one provision."

"And what may that be?"

"This. After taking possession of the gulch, they propose to elect a mayor to the town, who shall have the power of governing, making laws and appointing officers, the same as though we were a State by ourselves. They are, after noting your great prowess last night, willing to elect you as their leader, providing you marry and thus prove your faith and intention of remaining as their representative."

Kit laughed.

The idea was both preposterous and funny to him—the more so, perhaps, because he had no idea whatever of helping either party fight their battles, or of remaining longer in the gulch than was necessary to accomplish the remainder of his mission—the finding of Bertie Bird.

"Well," he observed, "I must say your party have a good way of cutting and drying things to suit their own convenience. Whom may they have selected for my bride to be?"

"No one less than their present leader, myself!" the Mormon's wife declared unblushingly. "It is their opinion that our combined business tact would work together harmoniously, and I am sure—I—I—"

"You wouldn't have any objections to marrying me, eh?" Kit finished with a smile.

"Exactly!" Queen assented. "Pardon any seeming boldness on my part—I simply mean business."

"Oh! yes; so I perceive. Well, in reply, it will be only business-like of me to tell you that I could never enter into a transaction of that kind!"

"You would not, you mean?" she replied, a little sternly.

"I cannot!" Kit replied. "I have other arrangements made for my future which I could not set aside were I ever so much inclined to favor your plans."

"Which you are not—that is plain to me. I see the whole thing now—you have another in view, and also a witch's reputed hoarded fortune. Oh! Cyclone Kit, that shall never be, take my word for it."

"You talk foolishly, my dear woman. Were I of a mind to marry Bertie Bird, as you hint, I should undoubtedly do so, without asking your permission!" Kit replied coolly. "I will bid you a pleasant good day, ma'am!"

And he turned and walked back toward the town, Queen Cordiz following at a distance, her pretty face assuming some remarkably ugly expressions to say the least.

"We shall see," she muttered, fiercely. "I will devote the best days of my life but what I'll win you, by fair means or foul—what care I, which way, since my young life has been wrecked to all good, by this Mormon monster, Juan Cordiz? They who have heretofore known Queen as a simple wayward child, shall find her suddenly developed into a powerful and strong-handed woman!"

And judging by her angry appearance, she meant every word of it.

"And as for the girl, Bertie Bird, I'll see to it that she don't get into Cyclone Kit's path. Once before she was my rival, and lived to tell of it, but as true as I live, she shall not triumph a second time. Oh! no! no! no!"

Cyclone Kit went back into the town, and stopped in at the saloon, to get a cigar. As he stood leaning against the bar, Alf Legree and Coyote Jake entered, and called for drinks.

After they had finished, Legree turned gruffly to Cyclone, his face grim and ugly in its expression:

"Well?" he said, interrogatively, "hev ye heerd the news?"

"It depends altogether on what the aforesaid news may be," Kit replied, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

"It's about the Prophet—he's jest about breathin' his last!" the ruffian said. "That means you're a—"

"Victor—not a murderer," Kit declared, anticipating him.

"That's what's the matter. You're a cuss on wheels—leasthow, that's what the hull caboodle o' Mormons say, Elders and all, and they've convened, and put their heads together, an' I've been detailed to read you the result!"

And with these words, the "bully" man of Gold-Flake drew a roll of manuscript from his pocket, unfolded it with an air of importance, and mounting a chair close by, cleared his throat, waved his hand, to enjoin silence, and began:

CHAPTER X.

GRIM.

"GOLD-FLAKE, UTAH, — 12th, 18—

"To Whom It May Concern:

"Whereas, in the course of human events, it becomes a people, and those people adherents to the Mormon faith, to be represented by a leader or Prophet, who is of exceeding divinity, grace and power of personal prowess, and—

"Whereas, it has become the will of the Great Ruler that our beloved Prophet and Ruler, Juan Cordiz, should be smitten down and taken off, by the hand of an assassin, and—

"Whereas, it becomes our duty as a people to be not without a form of government, in these days of sorry sin and treachery:

"Agreed, that we did assemble and convene, in body, at the Temple in the town of Gold-Flake, in communion, as one person, and made the following resolutions, to wit:

"Resolved, that, having been bereft of our Prophet and governing officer, through the medium of death, and agreed that the town and people's interests being in need of a guiding and protecting hand to fill the place of the one just stricken down—

"Resolved, that we elect a new Prophet and Governor to fill the vacancy. And, an inventory of the worthy men of the town having been made, and their general good and bad points having been presented and discussed—

"Resolved, that out of the entire lot, no man is so admirably fitted for the position as he who adheres to the name of Cyclone Kit, and further—

"Resolved, that such being the case, and he the evident choice of the people, that we pronounce him Prophet of the Gold-Flake Mormon Church, and Governor-Mayor of the Mormon State and town of Gold-Flake.

(Signed) THE PEOPLE."

"Thar—how d'ye like the taste of that, my huckleberry?" Legree cried, as he finished. "Didn't expect tew be treated tew sech a picnic, did ye?"

"Well, hardly, if you denominate such a proceeding a 'picnic,'" Kit replied. "They're evidently all bucking up the wrong tree, concerning your humble servant. I'm not an officer of any faction, whatever, nor am I a candidate therefor!"

"Oh! you won't step into a fat office like that, eh? Well, in that case ye ain't got so soft a snap, after all," Legree declared.

"For instance, here's a few words on the p'int, which I didn't read:

"In case the party hereby elected by us, shall refuse to perform the duties customary with his predecessor, or shall at any time attempt, unlawfully, to escape from the town, a jury selected from the Elders shall be impaneled, and he shall be adjudged guilty of misdemeanor, and sentenced to death, in whatsoever way said Elders may decide."

"That sounds better—more business-like, you see," Kit retorted, in his sarcastically cool way.

"And now, my ferocious-looking 'supe,' that you have exhausted so much of your wind in behalf of your muchly-married Mormon friends, you can have the privilege of exhausting another stock in apprising them that I shall neither play up Brigham for them, nor burden myself with a number of wives; more, I shall remain in the gulch as long as I please, and leave it whenever I please!"

Then, with his usual composure, the gladiator turned on his heel and sauntered out into the gulch once more.

Here he wandered about during the remainder of the day, keeping his eyes sharply about him, and wondering how it all would terminate. He had now refused to side with two different parties, and had thereby incurred their enmity. It would be but natural, then, that they should lay traps for his capture. Once they secured him, harsh measures would most likely be adopted.

But, though the same commotion was perceptible about the town all day long—the same groups of people here and there, and men hurrying to and fro, Kit could not see that they were making any hostile demonstrations toward him.

Just before sunset he resolved to make a tour around the edge of the valley, and a thorough examination thereof, to ascertain whether or not he could find the secret exit from the pocket other than the one by which he had entered. That this second trail existed was beyond question, but as yet he had not come across its starting-point.

A thorough inspection of the first or right-hand side resulted in no discovery, except that he came across the place where began the stone stairway, which ascended through the rocks to the Phantom Acre above.

Two rough-looking fellows guarded the arched entrance to the stairway, who gave Kit an ugly look as he approached, but he walked on without paying any attention to them.

He soon came to the chaparral jungle in the lower end of the gulch, similar to that in the upper end where the falls were located. Searching about, he soon found a narrow path along the bank of the stream, which penetrated into the heart of the thicket.

Following its course, he soon came to the mountain end of the gulch in that direction, and likewise into a small clearing in the thicket.

Before him the rapid stream rushed down under the base of the mountain through a black, tunnel-like hole of considerable size, there being enough space in the tunnel alongside the stream for a wagon track, which had evidently already been improved.

This then was the avenue by which the Mormons found their egress and entrance, when Old Meg, the witch, was laboring under the supposition that she had until recently held the only pass herself. The one before Cyclone Kit had evidently been in use a number of years.

This was not the only discovery that the sharp eyes of Cyclone Kit made.

Lying upon the ground in the clearing, not far from the tunnel entrance, were two dead men—ruffianly-looking fellows, who had been shot through the temple.

Near by, perched composedly upon a boulder, and engaged in gnawing some meat from a bone, was a skinny, withered-up little old man, who looked as if a good wind would blow him away. In face he was wrinkled and shriveled, with a big mouth, hook nose and little black eyes, which peered out from under a pair of shaggy overhanging brows. His face was barren of beard, and his hair was long, shaggy and tow colored.

His clothes were of the commonest description, and his only arms consisted of a revolver and a repeating rifle.

Kit came to a halt, and surveyed the fellow narrowly.

"Did you kill those men?" Kit demanded, pointing to the bodies.

"Yas, stranger, I rather calculate I did, ef old Vermont knows herself, an' what's more, I'm liable to fix ye the same way if ye come any o' yer bulldozin' 'round me!" was the reply in a sharp nasal voice.

"Oh! don't get in a fever on my account," Kit answered composedly. "I am not liable to hurt you unless you get obnoxious."

"Oh! ye don't say! Well, young man, that's good of you, an' ef I didn't remember your cool independent ways from boyhood I should be inclined to be offended!"

Kit surveyed the man a second time in astonishment.

"You know me?" he exclaimed, incredulously.

"Well, I reckon I do!" the shriveled-up individual declared. "You look jest as natteral as ye used to, by gum. Spect you don't know me, eh? Rather a hard-lookin' old crow-tail, I know, but then, I'm all here, what's left o' me."

"No, I do not know you—never saw you that I remember of before to-day, and I presume you are mistaken about knowing me."

"Not in the least. You are Cleve Carlson, as natural as life, except for your long hair, goatee, and frontier attire!"

Cyclone Kit uttered a surprised ejaculation.

"And who in blazes are you?" he gasped, approaching nearer to the superannuated stranger.

"I am Josh Grim, at your service—formerly your father's family servant, confidant and friend, but now of the Boston detective force."

Cyclone Kit went forward and extended his hand heartily.

"I believe I have heard my father speak of you—and speak well too—prior to his death, but I do not remember your face. What in the world brings you so far from Boston?"

"Business, sir—business, to the backbone!" Joshua replied, taking a chew of tobacco. "Ostensibly to find two heirs to a fine fortune—in reality to find the same and also a noted criminal. You may possibly have known him, since it was he who caused your departure westward, ho!"

"What! Arthur—my brother?"

"The same."

"Well, this is news, indeed. Of what has he been guilty, pray?"

"Oh! a good many things. In the first place, and most important, he is a murderer!"

Cyclone Kit staggered at this, and turned pale.

"My God! I never thought he'd come to that!" he said.

"And why not? A man mean enough to charge forgery upon his only brother, in order that he might win his brother's promised wife—a man like that, sir, is capable of any crime."

Cyclone Kit bowed his head in acknowledgment of the fact, a hard expression coming over his face.

"I never heard how that came out," he said. "Arthur and I had had a dispute, a few days before the blow came, during which I had occasion to knock him down, for slandering Maggie. He swore dire vengeance on my head, but I laughed at him. But I awoke to my mistake a few nights later, when, while standing at the depot, a friend came and told me that father's name had been forged in a large sum; that it was in my style of chirography, and that Arthur had openly accused me of it, and the officers were hunting for me. In one single moment I foresaw the disgrace that must follow, whether I were proved guilty or no. I shrunk from disgrace; I jumped aboard the train, and forever turned my back upon our home, of which I have never heard since. I suppose, however, that Maggie married Arthur, because she all the time rather favored him."

"Yes, poor fool, she married the infernal rascal and got her pay for it. He abused her like a pirate, and finally capped the climax by killing her, because she made oath before court that he was guilty of the forgery, instead of you. How he escaped, I do not know, being in Boston at the time, but escape he did, and I was telegraphed for and put on his track."

"It will not be well for him ever to run across my trail!" Cyclone Kit said, "for, even though he is my brother, he shall find me his deadly enemy."

"Presumedly, if I don't happen to nab him first, and bounce him back to Boston."

"But, you don't expect to find him in this confounded hole?"

"Well, I do. I trailed him like a fox, and am satisfied he is in this very Mormon town."

"You must be mistaken. I have seen nothing of him."

"Well, that matters not. I'll tell you why I think he is here!"

And then Grim went on to relate, in substance, if not exactly word for word, the same story of the Mather will—also that he believed Arthur Carlson had come to Gold Flake for the purpose of securing Bertie Bird, and winning her by representing Cleve Carlson as dead, or by force, if by no other means."

"And the rascal is evidently here, then!" Kit cried, excitedly, "for Bertie Bird suddenly disappeared last night, and has not yet been found."

"That settles it! Arthur Carlson is the man who has her," the detective said, emphatically. "If he has escaped from this hole, he may elude us."

"But, in event of his securing the girl, and inducing her to marry him, what can that acquisition possibly avail him? He could not go back to the scenes of his former crimes, without running the risk of arrest."

"No; but he probably has some plan in view, whereby he can arrange matters—for instance, like growing out his beard, and passing himself off as you, which, though a bold attempt, he could probably do, as you look alike as two peas, with conception of a few items which could be remedied. He is a great schemer, and any scheme is not too good for him to execute."

At this juncture, further conversation was interrupted, on that subject by the sound of approaching footsteps, and a moment later several rough-looking men entered the glade, at the head of whom was Alf Legree, looking as fierce as was his wont.

"Hello!" he cried, with an oath, as he beheld Kit and Josh Grim, and at the same time the dead guards.

"I thought we'd better look here for you, my festive gladiator, at which point it becomes me to arrest you in the name of the law, for the murder of Juan Cordiz!"

CHAPTER XI.

JOSH ADOPTS A SIX-IN-HAND.

The announcement was made in a peremptory manner, but did not seem to affect Cyclone Kit, whose revolvers were cocked and ready in his hands, the moment he caught sight of the men. And Josh Grim was not slow in grabbing up his rifle, on the defensive.

"You are probably hunting for another person!" Kit said, as he surveyed Legree and the Danites, coolly. "I am not a murderer, and you cannot try me as such. I met Juan Cordiz fairly, at the point of the sword, after first having mastered the beasts he turned loose on me—I had him down, once, and offered to make terms when he plead for mercy, but he refused, when I gave him another show for his life, and a dig in the side. Is he dead?"

"No, not yet, but since you have refused to assume his place, at the head of the people, they have resolved to arrest you and treat you the same as any common murderer. Until the Don dies, you will not be hung."

"I am of that same opinion, myself," Kit retorted. "I am not even a prisoner, yet, and I doubt if I ever am taken by such a looking gang as you. You'd better go back and get reinforcements."

"What! do you mean to say that you will not surrender?" Legree demanded, evidently surprised.

"That's the very ticket I vote, you bet!" Kit responded. "There's not enough man-meat in your whole crowd, to capture one side of me. Seeing is believing, and you have seen my caliber; so you'd better let up, while you've a chance. If you were to get into a fight with me, you'd need a fine-tooth comb to rake together your remnants, after the trouble is over!"

Legree and the other ruffians exchanged glances. Evident it was they had none too much confidence as to how such a battle would result, after having seen Kit's prowess in the ring, the night before.

"We ain't so sure about that ar' matter," Legree retorted, gruffly. "We've orders from the people, to nab and cage you, and we ain't liable to get bluffed out of our purpose!"

"Then, sail in, and take the consequences, I've given you fair warning," Kit answered. Joshua, you are with me, are you not?"

"Clean up to my cravat!" the Yankee detective assented, a dangerous twinkle in his eyes. "Count me a dozen, at least, as I'm purtickler death on Mormons."

"We'll see!" Legree yelled. "Forward, boys—at 'em hard!"

And the Danites sprung forward with yells.

Crack! bang! crack! bang! The reports of firearms awakened the echoes of the approaching evening and sent them reverberating through the walled basin.

Alf Legree paid the penalty of his folly before he had taken half a dozen steps. A bullet from Grim's repeating rifle effectually settled his accounts, as far as this world was concerned.

Coyote Jake immediately took the lead, and rushing on, weapons were clubbed in a desperate hand-to-hand conflict.

It is highly probable that the conflict would have resulted disastrously for the Danites had not re-enforcements come to their assistance, when they were beginning to stagger and waver under the fierce attack of Grim and Kit, in the shape of a dozen Mormon citizens, who of course sided in with the Danites, and in a jiffy our two defenders were surrounded and overpowered by sheer force of numbers.

Struggle as best they could, Kit and the detective were securely bound hand and foot.

Their feet, however, were released by order of Coyote Jake, and they were marched toward the Mormon town amid hoots of victory from their captors.

As they entered the village a mob of the Mormon believers lined the street, and howled, screeched and shook their fists threateningly.

"We're in for a picnic now," Kit remarked to the detective, who was marched beside him. "They're riled enough to string us up at once."

"I don't believe they'll go as far as that," Grim replied.

And he was right. They were taken direct to the temple and put under guard, on separate sides of the building, after which the majority of the crowd took their departure.

People came in and out for awhile during the evening, but about midnight they ceased their calls, and all was quiet until morning.

The two guards who kept watch over Cyclone Kit, and the same number who guarded Grim, were wide awake and vigilant the whole night. In the morning, relief-guards were sent to take their place, and they brought the news that Juan Cordiz was still alive, but sinking fast, and had expressed a wish to see Cyclone Kit hanged before he died.

Kit heard the report with seeming indifference.

"I presume, according to that, I will have a speedy trial," he said to the guard who had granted the information.

"You'll not be apt to get any trial at all!" was the gruff response. "I reckon they'll string you up without ado."

During the early part of the forenoon one of the elders entered the temple and approached Josh Grim, who sat with his head bowed in his hands.

The elder's name was Jones; he was a hard, cruel, selfish-looking man, who appeared better capable of conducting a massacre than a meeting or revival.

Grim looked up as he approached, his withered countenance wearing a doleful expression.

"Well, sir," the elder began, sternly, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing! nary a gol-darned thing," Josh responded, with his genuine Yankee twang. "I'm like the boy who eat a busbel of dried apples, over in Vermont; I hain't a word to say."

"Well, sir, we shall see about that. Who are you—what is your business here?"

"My name—why it's Joshua Grim, Eskwire, from Bosting, an' I'm agent fer ther Nonpareil Lightning Rod Company, by jingo, and you bet thar ain't another rod invented that can tech within forty-rods o' oun, on wardin' off lightnin'."

"If so, why did you take sides with yonder outlaw, and help to kill off several of our best men?"

"Waal, ye see, I didn't know which was wrong, an' which was right an' so I chipped in wi' ther weakest side. Them's my sentiments—I'd help a hen any time ef she couldn't lick a rooster."

"Then you had no purpose, other than this, in entering the affray?"

"Nary a darned one, by gosh!"

"It is well for you. Under any other circumstances you would be subject to a sentence of death. As it is, you will be granted a fate altogether different and better. You will have to become a Mormon among us, and your first initiation will be to marry at once. The late Elder Grimes, who died recently, left behind him six young and buxom wives—all workers, too—who would be glad to hitch up in the matrimonial barness again."

"Jee—beeswax! Ef that'll settle the thing jest trot out yer stock, an' I'll couple-up, you bet, providin' they're good-lookin'."

"Then, Mr. Grim, come right along with me, and you shall see for yourself!" Jones said, cutting the detective's bonds. "When you are wedded, you will be a full-fledged Mormon and entitled to the privileges of a fully established citizen."

And so Josh left the temple in company with the elder.

Once he was a Mormon, he argued to himself, he would have a better chance to work. That, of course, was his only object in joining the Mormons—it would disarm them of suspicion and enmity, and give him liberty to do what he could toward finding Bertie Bird, and rescuing Cyclone Kit from his impending peril.

Soon after leaving the temple they came to a group of six women, who were huddled together conversing excitedly, and evidently expecting the new catch the elder had in tow.

They ranged in age from twenty to forty years, were dressed alike in calico, and there was not one of the sextette, who was not beastly homely.

Grim's heart sunk within him in utter horror, as the elder paused and waved his hand toward them; he wondered what would be his fate, should he not be able to get out of this scrape into which he was about thrusting his neck? The thought was appalling.

"There they are, sir—they're all yours as I hereby pronounce you man and wives!" Jones announced. "What do you think of them, Joshua?"

"Oh Lord! I—I don't know!" Josh answered, his teeth chattering. "I—I wish I was back selling lightning rods!"

"A little timid you see," the elder observed to the women, "but he'll soon break in and be as giddy as a young butterfly; then, you want to look out for him, or he'll be bringing home a seventh Mrs. Grim, for you six to nourish and support in luxury and elegance."

"Never!" the six women said in a chorus—so forcibly, that the shock of their utterance made Josh feel light-headed, in the extreme.

"You bet!" he chimed in, believing it the best policy to keep on the right side of the squad, until he could give them the slip. "I ain't anxious to shoulder over half a dozen, jest now, till I get the nack o' supportin' 'em."

"I guess you're level-headed on that score, young man," Jones declared; "and now, I'd advise you to get a pan an' shovel, an' go to work

on the flats, down yonder, in order to get 'scales' enough to buy edibles for your large family."

"Yes, and you better be back hum, by sun-down, or I'll come arter you with a strap!" the eldest of the six declared, emphatically—a large, raw-boned feminine, with much of the bull-dog in her face.

"Keerest!" Josh agreed readily. He was only too glad to get off so easily. "I'll be with you at six P.M., honey!"

Then, he meandered off, at no mean sort of a pace, and procuring the necessary implements, he set to work with a number of other miners, on the gulch bottom, at the outer edge of the village, on the bank of the creek.

He worked steadily through the day, finding the 'pay-dirt' very rich, and while laboring, kept a weather-eye out to see if he were watched.

Once or twice he saw the big wife, No. 1, at a distance, which was enough to satisfy him that she was keeping a watch of his movements.

"I wonder how I'll manage to elude the old catamount?" he muttered. "One thing is certain—one thing and no more, just at present. If the old imp catches me, she'll have to hunt for me."

He waited until it was growing dark, and the other miners had quit work; then he skulked away to the vicinity of the temple, where he took refuge in a tool-house, until it should get dark enough for him to venture forth, with safety.

"If I can get Cyclone Kit free, and the girl Bertie Bird, and then capture the assassin, Arthur Carlson, I shall be pretty well satisfied with this trip," he mused, "as I shall make a snug sum, out of it."

While sitting in the tool-house, he was by no means idle, as many would have been.

Unbuttoning his vest, he took from an inside pocket a black false beard, wig, and misshapen hat.

The beard he fitted to his face and the wig to his head. The hat also was donned in place of the battered "plug" he wore.

Next he took off his clothing, turned it inside out, and put it on again.

Being reversible garments, he now presented an entire change of appearance. The clothing had evidently been prepared for a purpose, for the side now exposed to view, was covered with patches and mud, and he looked every inch a rough miner, and also strikingly resembled some of the Mormons whom he had seen about the valley.

"I guess I'll pass. My recent brides won't know me in the darkness."

"In troth tha won't," a decidedly Irish voice exclaimed. "Shure ye are the laddy-buck for make-ups!"

Grim started, and peered about him. Dark as it was, he was able to discern the outlines of a man's figure, looming up from behind a stack of implements, behind him.

"Hello! Who in thunder are you?" was the Yankee's exclamation, as he sprung to his feet.

"Faith, I'm meself, an' who in the devil be you?" was the answer.

"I'm a man, every inch of me, as you will find. Are you hiding here?" Grim demanded.

"Shure, I am, an' it's expectin' to be hauled out an' have tha skilp taken from me any minute, I am."

"What for? How came you here?"

"Och! I came here a devil a long spell ago, an' tha ould Turk tha called Don Juan, he wouldn't let me leave, an' made me act the loikes of his servant, an' called me Pietro. An' d'y'e know, tha worst of all, he called me an Italian, tha bloody thafe!"

"And so you're hiding from him for that, eh?"

"Devil a bit! Faith, he set me to guaard the girrul, the other night, an' a feller wid blud in his eye walked off wid her, leavin' me nothin' to do but go back to the Don an' git kilt ontirely, or hide away. So I've been schroochin' in here ever since, an' I'm as hungry as the sha-dow av a buckthorn bush after a drouth."

"Well, then, you're the very chap I want!" the other said. "I'm Josh Grim, detective from Bosting, Mass., an' I want you to help me!"

After collecting some points he needed to begin with, Grim left the tool-house, promising to return before daybreak and report.

On getting out into the night, he found that the darkness was not nearly so thick as when he had entered his place of refuge.

The cause for this was at once apparent. In front of the residence of Juan Cordiz, nearly the whole population of the town was gathered, watching or participating in some strange work that was going on.

In one place a number of men and women were carrying and adding fuel to an already large bonfire, the reflection of which lit up the heavens with a lurid glow.

In another place, and directly in front of a low veranda of the house, several other men were engaged at carpenter work.

It needed but one glance from Grim's eagle eye to inform him what they were building.

It was a scaffold!

Who for—Cyclone Kit, alias Cleve Carlson? It struck the detective so, and he uttered a moan of regret.

"It's too bad!" he growled. "They'll hang him in spite of me, unless I am smarter than I give myself credit for being. By blazes, I wish I had a squad of Bosting police up here now."

But he hadn't, and knew something had to be done, and that, too, right lively, if he succeeded in saving Cyclone Kit's neck from the noose.

A lot of the men and women were hooting and yelling in anticipation of what was to come, evidently, while another portion stood partly to one side, and took no part or interest in the demonstration.

Grim's keen eyes noted this fact, and he wondered at it, even while racking his brains in search of some suitable plan by which he could avert the impending doom of the prisoner of the temple.

For one single man to attempt to take the captive from such a crowd would be utter folly, as he well knew. To attempt to rescue him from the temple was equal foolhardiness, in all probability, as it was likely it was strongly guarded.

Again, there were chances that the guard had been lessened, owing to the approaching execution; and after viewing the matter in both lights, Grim decided to skulk around to the temple and make a reconnaissance.

He was about to do so, when a hand touched him lightly on the shoulder, and he turned quickly with a smothered cry of anger.

"Who the—" he began; but a cool, harsh voice interrupted him.

"Not so fast, Joshua Grim!" the harsh, cracked voice exclaimed; "I know ye of old!"

The detective looked puzzled.

He had seen a good many ugly-looking human beings in his time, but none who would hold a candle to the woman who stood before him, with arms akimbo.

And this woman was the so-styled witch of the Phantom Acre, Old Meg Mather!

"You know me!" Grim gasped, surveying her critically, the light of the great bonfire lighting up her furrowed features grotesquely. "Well, if you do, I must say you've got the advantage of me."

"No I haven't. You know me well, and I know you."

"But I say you're wrong. All I know about you is that you've got the ugliest mug I ever beheld on mortal woman."

"Indeed? How strangely currents of thought will sometimes run. I was just congratulating myself. I always supposed I was the homeliest person living, but I find that I am wrong. You are so much uglier looking than myself, that I already fancy myself quite pretty."

Grim laughed, for he appreciated the retort.

"Well, be that as it may, who are you, that you appear to know my name, here in a strange land?" he demanded.

"I am one whom you used to hook apples for when we were many years younger than now—you were living with the Carlisons at the time; I am one whom you used to throw admiring and wistful glances at, but never had the courage to pop the question, until it was too late; I am no more nor less than Meg Mather—that was, in those bygone days."

"You—you Margaret Bird?" Grim ejaculated, incredulously.

"Ay—the wreck of that once free-hearted, sunny-tempered and pretty girl. But why are you here? Tell me."

Grim did tell her, in as few words as possible, what he had told Cyclone Kit, and what is already known to the reader, concluding by saying:

CHAPTER XII.

GRIM AND OLD MEG.

In a short time after their meeting Grim and the Irishman had come to favorable terms, by which the latter was to give the Yankee detective such assistance as was in his power, and Grim in turn was to help the poor Hibernian to escape from the gulch and to civilized parts.

"And now, they're going to hang this Cyclone Kit for running the Mormon Prophet through with the sword during their combat the other night. If we do not do something for him at once we shall not be able to help him!"

"You say he has made efforts to secure my lost child for me?" the witch demanded, her features working and her wild eyes directed toward the gallows, now nearing completion.

"Of course! A finer fellow does not exist, and if he gets free he will undoubtedly endeavor to find Bertie and restore her to you."

"I believe you, and we must free him from this accursed Mormon mob!"

"Come!" she said, setting out toward the upper end of the village; "I think I have a plan that will secure his escape, and also vengeance for myself."

Grim followed, keeping his eyes well about him, for he had fears of the old witch, of the peril Kit was in, and of the general result.

He placed none too much confidence in the fidelity of the Irishman; he was afraid Meg did not know just what she was about; still, he followed her.

In the course of five minutes they came to a large shanty, and taking a bunch of keys from her pocket, Meg softly unlocked the door; then, motioning Grim to follow her, she flung open the door and entered the front room of the shanty. The detective followed, and closed the door after him.

They found themselves in a very commonly-furnished room, where a man was seated at a table, engaged in reading by candle-light from a book, evidently a Bible—a man of middle age, who was red-haired and bearded, and of portly build—a man with keen gray eyes.

He sprung up with a startled cry as he beheld the unceremonious intrusion of the witch and Grim. He reached toward his hip-pocket, but a motion from Meg warned him to desist, and he obeyed.

"Ha! ha! you know better than to pull a weapon on me, Joe Bird!" the witch cried. "You fear my vengeance, and know better than to trifle with me!"

"Who are you? What do you want?" the Mormon demanded in a gasp, looking in alarm first to Grim and then to the witch.

"You know who I am!" Meg retorted, fiercely. "I am the one you left to shift for herself when you turned renegade to join the accursed Mormon gang of thieves and cut-throats. I am the wife you promised to love, honor and protect."

Bird was silent. His head was slightly bowed; his eyes were fastened upon the floor, while Meg went on:

"You turned me loose with the wolves in the mountains, and there I have since remained. Where is our child, Joe Bird? Speak! Tell me where she is!"

"I do not know," was the reply, in a sort of whining tone. "I've heard she is missing—thought likely you had her."

"You lie, Joe Bird—you lie! You knew better than that, and had not a care what had become of her. Do you know what I've sworn to do, Joe Bird?"

"No; I know nothing about you, woman."

"Well, I've sworn an oath that I will kill you and rid the world of such a viper as you are. What is the present number of your Mormon wives?"

"Six," was the unblushing reply.

"What! so few? I supposed you had a score at least. Well, sir, you can depend upon it, then, that you will have to die six deaths to pay for your folly. But not yet. I have other work for you to do, by doing which you will prolong your lease of life. You have heard that a young man named Cyclone Kit is about to be executed?"

Bird nodded.

"This man, Cyclone Kit," Meg went on, "is the eldest son of Judge Carlson, who once helped you to get money to save you from going to the war. Put on your hat. You have got to secure for him his liberty and save him from hanging."

"I cannot do it!" the renegade husband replied, nervously. "I cannot—really I cannot!"

"But, you will, though, or die right here, in your tracks. It's your only chance to prolong your life! Take your choice; Free Cyclone Kit, or die!"

"How can I free him?" the man asked, growling. "I am not his jailer, or his judge!"

"No, but you have access to the temple, and can easily slip in and set him free, before he is led forth to execution. Quick! decide! If you do not obey, I'll kill you, and attempt his rescue, myself!"

Bird reached for his hat, proving that he knew what was best for his personal safety.

"Go ahead, and I will follow," he said.

"Hardly!" Meg sneered, "you go ahead and we will follow. That will look better!"

Undoubtedly Bird would have demurred, at this, only that the sight of a cocked revolver, in Meg's hand did not seem to inspire him with any great amount of courage.

So he led off, Meg followed, and Josh brought up the rear, in great anxiety.

The parley in the shanty had been a source of agony to him.

He feared that they would be too late, in reaching the temple, to save Kit—and he was not wrong.

On reaching the queer stone structure, Joseph Bird softly unlocked the front door, and entered.

A moment later, he came out, and paused upon the steps.

"You are too late!" he announced. "They have already taken the prisoner to execution."

"Then you die on the portals of this sacrilegious church!" Meg cried, and raising her weapons, quickly fired.

With a groan, her faithless husband placed his hand over his heart, and fell, never to rise again in life, as she supposed.

"That is murder, probably, but it is at least ridding the world of one viper!" she gritted, turning to Grim. "Come! we've work to do. Plan your own actions, and execute them—I will do likewise, and see you later!"

Then, she was off, like a deer, and out of sight ere the Yankee could speak.

Seeing that he was left to work by himself, he turned his footsteps hurriedly toward the bonfire.

When he arrived near the place of execution, he paused, and gazed sharply around him.

A few of the villagers noticed him, and nodded, seeming to mistake him for some one of the Mormon miners.

The scaffold had been completed by this time, and looked ominous and uninviting enough, as made plain to view in the light of the roaring bonfire.

Cyclone Kit stood at the bottom of the stairs, in charge of four strong men.

At an open window of his mansion, Don Juan sat, bolstered up in a chair, so that he could have a good view of the gallows.

Beside him was a revolver, which he was to fire off whenever he wanted the prisoner brought upon the scaffold.

Ringing a bell, at his right hand, a servant soon entered the room.

"Bring me a glass of brandy!" he gasped.

The waiter obeyed. With a gulp the wounded Prophet downed the fiery liquor, then smacked his lips.

"That imparts new life!" he said, a glitter in his baleful eyes. "I shall get well, yet, in spite of them. But that fact shall not stay the execution. Oh! no!"

He raised the revolver, and fired it out through the window, aiming the shot at Queen Cordiz, whom he saw standing below, the majority of the sturdy men of the town at her back, and all noticeably well armed—a fact he had not noticed, until now.

Immediately after the shot was fired, Cyclone Kit was led upon the gallows; then his feet were bound, the noose placed around his neck, and all was in readiness!

"Cyclone Kit, this is your chance to utter a short prayer, while I count one! two! three!" Don Juan called from the window. "You are too great a man to live in this age—you must emigrate to the Better Land. One!"

No answer from Kit. Brave fellow that he was he evidently disdained to speak to his enemies.

"Two!" shouted the Don, eagerly.

"Three—at your peril!" a voice the next instant hissed in his ear!

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE GALLOWS.

WITH an oath born of cowardly fear, Juan Cordiz jerked his head around, to behold the horrible grinning visage of Old Meg, close to his own.

"Sh!" the witch hissed again, her upraised hand clutching a large glittering knife; "not a word, or I'll cut your throat from ear to ear, you wretch!"

"Curse you! get away!" Juan gasped, shuddering.

"Ha! ha! no—not until I have made you spite yourself. Speak not the word 'three'—if you do, I'll leave you weltering, here, in your own life's blood. Direct those men to give

Cyclone Kit his liberty, and I will leave you to die a natural death!"

"No, no! You shall not cheat me of my vengeance!" Cordiz gritted. "Three!"

Promptly, as the words burst from his lips, to the hearing of the spectators, the trap of the scaffold dropped, and—

Bang! the report of a rifle was next heard, and, instead of dangling in mid-air, Cyclone Kit dropped through to the ground, unharmed. The bullet, sent by the unerring aim of Josh Grim, with a rifle he had secured, had cut the death noose in twain.

A murmur of mingled approval and disapproval burst from the spectators;—then came a great cry as the crowd of Queen Cordiz rushed forward, and drew up in line confronting the other villagers, with leveled weapons, Queen in the lead.

"Halt!" she cried, in a stern, shrill voice. "Henceforth, I am ruler of Gold-Flake, and Mormonism is at an end. Surrender, or we will shoot you down, like the dogs you are!"

"Never!" a man cried, springing to the lead of the Mormons. "Rally, subjects of Juan Cordiz, and members of the Mormon church, and we will sweep these renegades from the earth!"

The appeal was not in vain.

Comprehending the peril that menaced them, the Mormons drew their weapons, and responded to the call—men, women and children joining in, as a rush was made upon the insurrectionists.

Wild yells, ringing commands, fierce curses and screams, and the deadly rattle of pistol shots were the sounds of the next few moments—a spell when it seemed that pandemonium had broke loose.

Fierce and deadly waged' the conflict, each party fighting with all the power they possessed. It was a strange sight, too, nearly two-thirds of the Mormon force being composed of sturdy women, while only one woman headed the attacking party.

Men were there in Queen Cordiz's force who were fighting against their Mormon wives, who had refused to forsake their faith in the church.

Josh Grim, as soon as he saw the condition of affairs, withdrew a short distance, and then made a roundabout circuit through the darkness so as to reach the Cordiz house from the side, and without being observed.

He was successful, but to his disappointment, found no mode of entrance to the dwelling on that side, and was obliged to make a retreat.

In the darkness, at a safe distance, he stood and watched the conflict, knowing it must soon end. He could do no more, until it was safer to investigate.

And he was right.

The Mormons soon broke, and beat a retreat toward the falls end of the locked valley.

The victorious band gave chase, but speedily gave it up, as their enemies dodged everywhere, in the darkness, and succeeded in making good their escape.

The anti-Mormons then returned to the vicinity of the bonfire, and held a consultation.

While this was going on, Grim saw several of them enter the Don's mansion, only to speedily return with some communication that seemed to cause a deal of excitement, among their companions.

Shortly afterward, water was thrown on the bonfire until it was entirely extinguished, and darkness reigned supreme, in the locked valley.

For once in his life Grim was at a loss what to do. But, one thing—it was necessary for him to maintain his liberty, in order to accomplish the mission on which he had come to this wild and outlawed country.

In the mean time, what had become of Cyclone Kit?

So suddenly after his drop from the gallows had the battle occurred, that probably no one except Josh Grim had taken the second thought of him.

When "two" was spoken by Juan Cordiz, Kit had nerved himself for the final end.

And when "three" came, and the trap gave away, he had but one thought—that was expressed in prayer.

But, when after a sharp jerk on his neck, the rope parted, at the instant of the rifle report, and he dropped upon the ground, he knew some one had befriended him, if only temporarily.

His wits were not so strangled out of him but what he knew enough to fall forward on the ground with his face downward, and lay perfectly still—and that was probably what saved his life, although he had no thought of its doing so.

He heard the battle, and listened to its fury, understanding that Queen Cordiz had struck her blow for obtaining the rule of the locked town of Gold-Flake. He heard the retreat of the Mormons—heard the chase given by the victorious party. Raising his head and glancing around, he saw that now was his opportunity to escape.

His feet and hands were bound, but at once rolling over to the edge of the fire, he applied his wrists, or rather the rope that bound them, to a fagot, and allowed the fire to so eat into the rope, that he was soon able to burst the bonds, and his hands were free. Before he could serve his feet in a like manner, however, he heard the tramp of approaching feet, and knew the anti-Mormons were returning.

So to save himself from recapture, he hurriedly crept off into the darkness, leap-frog fashion, going to a safe distance before halting.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

THEREFORE, it was, that, after the anti-Mormons had retired from the vicinity of the gallows, Josh Grim cautiously approached the place where he had seen Cyclone Kit fall, but found him not.

"It is probable that he is in the power of the victors," was the detective's conclusion, after he had thought the matter over. "I must wait till morning, for further investigation."

So he crept into the Cordiz mansion, which was to all appearances deserted, and lay down in sort of an alcove, which opened off the main hall.

Here he remained until the first streaks of dawn were visible through the open door, when he arose, and went out of the house.

From the doorstep he made a reconnoissance.

Queen Cordiz's party had camped in the lower end of the valley, near the edge of the chaparral, and as a matter of course, held the tunnel avenue of escape from the town.

The Mormons had camped just beyond the village, in the other part of the gulch, and were adjacent to the stair exit, by way of old Meg Mather's Phantom Acre.

Both forces were already astir, but whether preparing for hostilities or not, Grim was unable to determine, owing to his distance from them.

Outside, in and about the Cordiz mansion, the greatest quiet prevailed, and nowhere could be seen anything of Cyclone Kit.

The bodies of those who had been slain, the night before, still lay in front of the mansion, stark and stiff, but investigation proved that the young gladiator was not numbered with the unfortunates.

"He has either escaped from the gulch, or is hiding, somewhere!" Grim muttered, "for I see nothing of him in either camp. I'll make an inspection of this house, and see if there is anything to be discovered, here; then I'll go in search of Kit."

He re-entered the mansion, and made a tour of the different rooms, most of which had been used as sleeping apartments, by the Don's bevy of wives.

The last room he entered was the one which Don Juan had occupied, at the time of the interrupted execution, and here a strange sight awaited the vision of the Yankee—a sight that caused him to pause on the threshold.

Upon the floor, lying partly in a pool of his own life blood, and with his throat cut from ear to ear, was the Mormon Prophet of Gold-Flake, Juan Cordiz.

Kneeling beside him, and peering eagerly into his rigid face, was a clumsy, loutish-looking lad of some seventeen years, who was clad in rags, and was dirty and disgusting-looking in the extreme. His face was beardless; his tow-colored hair looked as if it had never known the acquaintance of a comb; his eyes were sharp, and like unto a mink's.

He heard nothing of Grim, evidently, until the latter uttered an exclamation of surprise; then, he sprung to his feet, and made a motion to run, but Josh's revolver caused him to halt.

"Stop!" Grim ordered, authoritatively. "What are you afraid of? I'm no Mormon, and I guess you ain't, neither, judging by your scare. Who are you?"

The boy's shrewd eyes looked the Yankee over, thoroughly, ere he answered; then he put up his hands, and with wonderful rapidity made some queer contortions with the fingers and thumbs.

"Oh! dumb, eh?" Grim said, understandingly. "Your name is Tom Hayman, eh?"

The boy nodded—then shook his head and pointed to his ears, as much as to say he could hear and understand.

"I see!" Josh said. "You are not deaf, but dumb. How long have you been so?"

"Three years," the mute answered, in his dumb language; then he opened his mouth and showed the detective that he had no tongue. It had been cut off, 'way back in his mouth, rendering him speechless.

Josh shuddered at the sight; to him it was more than terrible.

"Did you know him?" he asked, indicating the murdered Don.

"I know him," the boy telegraphed back slowly, so that Josh could read his motions.

"He cut my tongue out, so I could not betray his crimes to the authorities. But he's dead now, and I've got the best of him!"

And he held up a key as he spoke—a huge one it was, made of iron, and evidently hand wrought.

"What is that—what does it belong to?" Grim demanded in surprise.

The mute laughed.

"It means a fortune for us," he said. "It's the key to the Mormon treasure vault, and if you're an honest man, not in league with the Mormons, there's enough for us both."

"That hits me to a capital Z!" Josh assented. "I suppose you want to escape from this valley?"

"I want to go East, where the money will support me while I live," the boy replied.

"Then all you've got to do is join forces with me, and we'll soon leave this place behind. Who killed the Don?"

The tongueless boy answered that he had found the Prophet dead a short time before and did not know who was the author of the crime.

Grim then plied him with questions, and learned that Cyclone Kit was indeed in the power of Queen Cordiz, having been retaken shortly after escaping from the vicinity of the gallows, by the Irishman, Pietro, who had swooped down on him ere he could get his feet free, and struggled with him until some of Queen's men came to his assistance.

"If I get a whack at the blamed Irishman, I'll fix him," the Yankee muttered, emphatically. "He deserves killing."

He further learned from the mute that by following the valley stream down through the mountain tunnel he would eventually debouch into another stream that, after many miles of winding, crossed the Union Pacific railroad, near one of its stations, thus affording a ready outlet to civilization.

They left the mansion and stole into the very heart of the village, where they sought shelter in a one-roomed log cabin, which boasted of one small window, and a stout oaken door.

Entering this they fastened the door on the inside, and proceeded to make themselves at home.

The day passed quietly, no sound of hostile demonstrations on the outside reaching their hearing.

Speaking to Dumb Tom concerning the whereabouts of Arthur Carlson and Bertie Bird, Grim found that the lad knew not what had become of them, which was strange, seeing that Tom was familiar with nearly every hiding-place in the limits of the walled valley.

Just as the shadows of another nightfall were beginning to approach the two men heard footsteps in the vicinity of the cabin.

"What shall we do?" Grim asked. "If discovered here we'll be in a bad fix."

"Never mind!" Tom answered. "Keep still, and we stand a good show of not being discovered."

Soon the footsteps came close up to the door, and then all was quiet for several minutes, after which a dark shadow loomed up in the little window near the roof—the head and shoulders of no less a personage than Pietro, the Irishman.

"Ha! ha!" he yelled, his face distorted in a devilish grin. "You are caged, ye spalpeens, an' this is me revenge on the dumb divil!"

He dodged down then, just in time to escape a bullet from Grim's revolver, and his footsteps were heard rapidly retreating.

"We are caged!" Grim said, unbarring the door and trying to open it. "The infernal Irishman has barred it on the outside, sure enough!"

Dumb Tom looked scared.

"That's bad!" he signaled with his fingers. "If we can't get out we're as good as dead men, for Queen Cordiz hates me even more than the Don did."

"And is there no way of getting out of this place?" Grim demanded, excitedly.

"I see or know of no way," was the answer. "The window is too small for us to get out, and the roof cannot be reached. So I guess about the best conclusion to adopt is that we are prisoners!"

And the more they tried to study a way out of their dilemma the firmer became their conviction that Pietro had told the truth when he had said they were caged.

Darkness grew dense and denser without, but after awhile it seemed to change.

Grim pointed to the window. The night certainly was growing rapidly lighter.

"Fire!" he gasped, growing pale.

"Ay! fire!" the dumb boy answered by finger telegraph. "We're in a bad fix now, for sure. Old Meg, the witch, is carrying out her threat!"

"What was that?"

"She threatened years ago to some day lay the Mormon town in ashes. And it looks as if she were at the work now!"

Grim had no doubt of it when through the little window he saw the red glow upon the heavens and the smoke settling into their prison.

Were they to become helpless victims of the conflagration?

It looked so!

Dumb Tom had not lied when he said that Cyclone Kit had been retaken.

Surprised, and bound as he was, he had little chance to fight against the Irishman, who sprung upon him and held him until some of the Queen's gang came to his assistance, when Kit was once more overpowered and taken along with the anti-Mormons to their camp.

Here he was bound upon his back to a fallen tree, which had some time tumbled down the mountain side into the gulch, and was left to make the best of his situation until morning.

As soon as day dawned, Queen Cordiz approached him and looked down into his face triumphantly.

"Well, I see you've come down a peg or two," she observed. "You ain't so much of a bravo as you used to was!"

"Perhaps!" Kit retorted, nonchalantly. "Because I'm in harness, I am not tamed to submission, by any means."

"Well, I admire your pluck. You certainly do deserve the title of a brave man, and I am ready to give you your liberty at a moment's notice, if you are agreeable to the conditions."

"Which you know I am not. All that I want is to find Bertie Bird, and then escape from this accursed valley."

"Ha! ha! the beautiful Bird is where you will not get her very soon!" Queen said, tauntingly. "She is in the power of your enemy as well as mine!"

"You mean Arthur Carlson?"

"Yes; the present successor to Don Juan!"

"Ah! is he in the lead of the Mormon forces?"

"He is, curse him!"

"I see! I see!" Kit said, a new thought dawning upon his mind. "It was you and he whom I saw walking in the valley, one night, not long ago, and he gave you money?"

"Yes. It was me you saw with him. I was first to discover his presence here, and finding he was in quest of my fair enemy, Bertie Bird, I, of course, gave him what little assistance I could."

"And now you've got your pay by his turning against you?"

"Exactly! but he'll find that he's sided with the wrong party. I expect a new recruit of fellows from the silver districts, soon, and then we'll clean the Mormon gang out, sure, if we don't do it before. And you can bet that I'll take so good care of the fair Bertie that she'll never stand in my way again!"

"If you ever harm a hair of that innocent girl's head, I'll take your scalp to pay for it, if I have to hunt the world over for it!" Kit replied, a deadly flash in his eyes, that the girl captain did not like, evidently, for she uttered a defiant laugh and turned away.

Kit was left in the same by-no-means pleasant position, the greater share of the day, and no attention was paid to him.

Toward sunset, however, Queen again approached him.

She was accompanied by four burly men, who looked amply able to handle the helpless prisoner.

"Cyclone Kit!" the young woman said, sternly, "once and for the last time I ask you—will you come to the terms I lately proposed to you?"

"Emphatically, once and for all, no!" the gladiator replied, firmly.

"Very well. Your fate be on your own head then. I have come to the conclusion that you would be a dangerous party to have around, at best, and not wishing to kill you outright, I have prepared a better scheme for getting rid of you. I'm going to send you on a long voyage, down-stream, and if you don't happen to get spilled out and drowned, you will eventually find yourself in the gulf of Mexico, providing you are not rescued. Bring him along, boys."

The men cut Kit loose from the log, and raising him, carried him to the shore of the creek, where they deposited him upon his back, in a small skiff, and pushed him off into the current, as they did so giving vent to some of the wilder screeches Kit had ever heard, the Queen joining in with them.

But Kit did not reply.

He knew something that caused him not to mind their yells.

In cutting him loose from the log, one of the men had accidentally, and without noticing the fact, cut one of the ropes that bound Kit's wrists.

Waiting till the boat had drifted into the cover of the chaparral, Kit sat up in the boat, and freed his wrists.

By this time the frail craft had dashed into the tunnel, and all was inky darkness, the rushing waters making a terrible roar.

For fear of getting his head severely bumped, Kit had to lie down, again, in the boat, and work to get his feet free, in that position.

The boat was going with much velocity, owing to the rapid descent in the water-course, and he knew he was in imminent peril, unless he could soon get free; besides, he was being carried further and further from the locked valley.

Finally he succeeded in freeing his feet, and nerving himself, he dropped overboard, still retaining a hold on the boat.

The water was up to his waist, and nearly swept him from his feet, but he struggled manfully, and at last reached the side wagon-trail, and landed himself and the boat.

He calculated that the little craft might come into play at some future time, if not now, and accordingly stood it up on end in a dark, rocky niche, beside the trail, where he thought it would not be noticed.

Then, wringing out his garments as best he could, he set out up the gloomy tunnel trail, thanking Providence that he had got out of the scrape so luckily.

"If I know myself, that's the last time Cyclone Kit gets roped in hereabouts," he muttered, as he tramped along through the darkness. "I'll go back and capture my Bird, hunt up Grim, and then light out, you bet!"

The boat had carried him a greater distance than he at first had supposed, and it took him over an hour to get out of the tunnel.

In the glade he saw the bodies of the victims of the affray that he and Grim had participated in, and noting the fact that they were well-armed, he proceeded to re-equip himself with a good pair of revolvers, a knife, a rifle and a full cartridge-box.

Then he crept along the bank of the stream, until he came to the open valley.

Just ahead of him lay the camp of Queen Cordiz, and not desiring to run the risk of recapture, he waded across the stream, and dodged along the opposite side of the valley until he was in close proximity to the camp where the Mormons were gathered around several fires, engaged in cooking their suppers.

From his position, Kit could see his renegade brother, Arthur Carlson, and his temptation to shoot him was great; but he desisted.

Bertie Bird was not among the crowd, he concluded, for he could not see that any of the females were guarded, or under any restraint, whatever.

"He must have her concealed in some of the habitations," the gladiator muttered, "and now is my time to search for her, while the houses are deserted."

He forded the stream, once more, and began a hurried inspection of the shanties, nearly all of which boasted of open doors.

Soon after, the fire broke out—first in one place—then in another, until buildings were on fire nearly all around him.

"It's high time for me to be getting out of this, as soon as convenient," was his conclusion, as he saw that it was indeed destined to be a general conflagration.

"There's one cabin, yonder, however, whose door is barred outside, that I would like to explore."

So he ran over to it, and listened.

"Who's there?" a voice cried from the inside, which he recognized as belonging to Josh Grim. "For God's sake, whoever you are, open the door and save us from being burnt alive!"

"Certainly!" Kit replied, cheerily, and open flew the door.

Josh uttered a joyous cry, when he saw who was his rescuer, and there was a hand-shake, after which Kit said:

"Come! we must not get hedged in by the flames. Let's get to one end of the gulch, or the other."

"Then, let it be to the falls end," Grim said.

They accordingly left the village by the darkest route possible, and succeeded in reaching the edge of the chaparral in safety.

Here they paused to view the conflagration, which was making all parts of the gulch as light as day.

"Look!" Grim said, pointing toward the Mormon camp. "Some one is coming this way."

Sure enough, they saw a man coming in the direction of the chaparral.

As quickly as possible they got in under cover and waited. The man, who was Arthur Carlson, came and entered the thicket. He was gone about ten minutes when he returned, leading Bertie Bird by the arm.

"See!" he said, pointing to the flames; "the town is on fire, and now is our chance, during the confusion, to escape. What do you say—will you go with me, willingly and peacefully, or shall I kill you on the spot, and end the matter?"

"Kill me a dozen times, you wretch, but I will never yield to your villainous purpose!" the brave girl cried, scornfully, drawing her figure to its fullest height.

"Nor need you!" Josh cried, leaping from the thicket, followed by Kit and Dumb Tom. "Arthur Carlson, I arrest you in the name of the law for wife-murder!"

The renegade glared at the confronting trio an instant—then, before they could prevent him, he drew a knife and plunged it to his heart!

Three days later, Cyclone Kit, Dumb Tom, Grim and Bertie left Phantom Acre forever, taking with them all the gold they could carry—not from the Mormon treasury, but from the pile old Meg had hoarded up in her cave.

The poor woman, it was found, had been killed by some avenging Mormon.

Cyclone Kit proceeded with Miss Bird to Boston, helped her settle her business there, and then, accompanied by Dumb Tom, returned to the Far West.

But it is probable he will return East at no distant day to wed Bertie.

Of Gold-Flake nothing now remains but a few black timbers, and desolation rules supreme where Mormon rule once held sway.

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